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Subject: House approves contentious California drought measure

By Annie Snider

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The House approved a controversial California drought measure that is aimed at shipping more water to the state's powerhouse agricultural region, although the bill faces long odds in the upper chamber.

House lawmakers voted 230-190 in favor of H.R. 23 (115) from Rep. David Valadao (R-Calif.), mostly along party lines. The measure seeks to ensure reliable water supplies for the massive agriculture industry in California's Central Valley by loosening environmental protections in the fragile Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay-Delta and greasing the skids for new dam construction across the West.

"Droughts are nature's fault; water shortages are our fault. They're a choice we made a generation ago when we chose to neglect our infrastructure and mismanage our water," said Rep. Tom McClintock (R-Calif.), one of the state's staunchest water warriors.

The H.R. 23 vote follows a tough fight last year over the bipartisan drought bill Congress passed into law that altered endangered species protections and created new programs aimed at ensuring long-term water sustainability in the state. Many of the new bill's provisions were included in previous House bills but were dropped during negotiations on last year's measure.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), who led negotiations for the upper chamber on last year's bipartisan measure, has fiercely opposed the new drought measure, as has the state's other Democratic senator, Kamala Harris, as well as Gov. Jerry Brown (D). They contend it would override state laws, violate the Endangered Species Act and choose winners and losers within California.

WHAT'S NEXT: The measure moves to the Senate, where it faces stiff opposition.

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