



The Sacramento Bee

Doolittle launches Auburn dam drive

By Herbert A. Sample
Bee Washington Bureau

and Kimberly A. Moy
Bee Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — Rep. John Doolittle on Tuesday proposed building a flood-control dam near Auburn that could be transformed into a multipurpose facility that would inundate miles of American River canyons while also

supplying water to nearby residents and businesses.

The proposal, contained in a "discussion draft" circulated by Doolittle, marks the Rocklin Republican's first official step toward winning congressional approval to spend nearly \$1 billion — most of it from the U.S. treasury — for a dam.

It also marks the beginning of a political challenge for the third-term lawmaker, who has voiced repeated assurances that a GOP-

led Congress ultimately can be persuaded to approve the dam's construction and financing.

But strong opposition already has surfaced from a key Republican congressman. Environmental and taxpayer groups also are gearing up to block the dam measure, as they did in 1992 when a similar proposal was defeated on the House floor.

Environmentalists say an Auburn dam

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WEDNESDAY

February 7, 1996

Dam: \$934 million project

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would devastate pristine American River canyons.

"We're indifferent about the kind of dam," said Tom Graff, spokesman for the Environmental Defense Fund. "They're all a bad idea. They're all fiscally irresponsible."

Doolittle, in a letter to Rep. Robert Matsui, D-Sacramento, appealed for bipartisan support among the Sacramento area's congressional representatives for his proposal.

"We must not solve one half of our area's water management problems while ignoring the other," Doolittle wrote. "We are also duty bound to provide our region with a solution to its water needs."

Matsui, in an interview, called Doolittle's work "a good start" but cited two major problems that he said must be resolved before he could support the proposal.

First, Matsui said the language pertaining to Folsom Dam's operation while the Auburn dam is under construction would not provide Sacramento with sufficient flood protection.

Second, there were no stated guarantees of a certain level of flood protection after the Auburn dam becomes a multipurpose facility with a lake behind it, he said.

Butch Hodgkins, executive director of the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency, said he was pleased that Doolittle's proposal meets most of the measures sought by the local flood-control board.

"It's a good start and shows there's not a huge gap (with Matsui and Fazio's proposals)," Hodgkins said.

Like Matsui, Hodgkins said he was concerned that the proposal did not "make clear that Sacramento will have the flood protection it pays for" if the dam is expanded for multipurpose use.

The flood-control dam, when its gates are closed, would inundate several miles of the American River's north and middle forks, depending on the amount of water retained. A multipurpose dam that retained a lake would permanently flood many more miles, eliminating several popular

whitewater rafting runs.

But the larger dam also would supply as much as 2.3 million acre-feet of water to Sacramento-area users, according to Doolittle's proposal. The federal Bureau of Reclamation recently estimated that by 2030, the region will require 521,000 acre-feet more water than can now be provided.

Rep. Vic Fazio, D-West Sacramento, voiced concerns about how Doolittle's proposal addresses flood control and noted the bureau's water study cited other options for meeting future water needs.

"I hope that Mr. Doolittle remembers that that study included other, less expensive alternatives to address the water deficit," said Fazio, who requested the bureau's study and helped secure funding for it.

Ed Schnabel, general manager of the Sacramento Metropolitan Water Authority, said an Auburn dam would be the most reliable water source among the options studied. He said 11 local water agencies are strongly interested in tapping into the water supply produced by a multipurpose dam.

Doolittle's proposal says that local water agencies and others who reap benefits from a multipurpose dam would pay for the costs to expand the flood-control dam.

Matsui and Fazio last week floated their own draft legislation, which also would authorize a flood-control dam but was silent on the issue of a multipurpose facility.

Matsui, Fazio, Doolittle and other Sacramento-area lawmakers hope to hammer out a compromise by the end of the month, when a House subcommittee is expected to hear testimony on the dam issue.

But one critic was particularly blunt.

"Here's my answer to the Doolittle bill: Over my dead body," said Rep. Thomas Petri, R-Wis., who spearheaded opposition to the 1992 dam proposal and last week introduced a bill to block federal funding for the dam.

"The people of California would never do this if they had to use their own money, and I don't see why federal taxpayers should be called on to support a mammoth

project of this kind," Petri added.

Doolittle's proposal contains two parts. The first, dealing mainly with flood control, includes language that would:

- Authorize construction of a flood-control dam — one that would retain water only when downstream areas are threatened by a flood — on the north fork of the American River at an estimated 1996 cost of \$934 million, with the federal government paying a bit more than \$700 million of that.

- Authorize other flood-protection measures, such as improvements to downstream American River levees and riverbanks, construction of a flood-control project on Magpie Creek and completion of studies on south Sacramento's flood-prone Morrison Creek.

- Establish an independent board that would ensure that construction of the flood-control dam did not impede future expansion into a multipurpose facility.

The second portion of Doolittle's proposal would:

- Allow for the flood-control dam to be transformed into a multipurpose facility at any time in the future "without further federal authorization" if local water suppliers signal their readiness to finance the change.

- Transfer nearby land, rights-of-way, water rights and facilities now held by the federal government to the state, without compensation, once the flood-control dam is completed.

Jill Lancelot, legislative director of a national taxpayers group — Taxpayers for Common Sense — called Doolittle's draft a "wish list that we can't afford and is out of step with fiscal reality." She added that the project's ultimate cost would almost certainly exceed current estimates.

The Sacramento Bee



FRIDAY
March 15, 1996

United front on Auburn dam bill

By Herbert A. Sample
Sacramento Bureau

WASHINGTON - Sacramento's congressmen, shaking hands on an issue they fought for four years ago, reached agreement Thursday evening on legislation to authorize construction of an Auburn dam. The pact between the dam's chief sponsor, Rep. John Doolittle, R-Rocklin, and Reps. Robert Matsui, D-Sacramento, Vic Fa-

zio, D-West Sacramento, and Richard Pombo, R-Tracy, clears the way for the quagmire to present a unified front before a key House subcommittee next week.

But while the agreement moves one of the major obstacles that doomed a similar bill in 1992, the congressmen stressed that the \$934 million dam still has a very long, arduous path to approval.

"It's going to be very tough," Doolittle said in an interview.



Rep. John
Doolittle

The Rocklin
Republican
said the bill
faces a "very
tough" road to
passage.

"Every turn will be met with new obstacles. However, in unity there is strength and I think we have achieved a proposal embraced by the four members who represent the various parts of Sacramento County."

"If we weren't all together," Matsui said, "we wouldn't have

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Dam: Compromise on expansion

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been in the ballpark. Now we're in the ballpark ... and at least we can play. This is a real critical step."

"This is an effort to reach as much consensus as we can so we can speak with as much consensus as we can to our colleagues," Fazio said.

Fazio and Matsui are to become "original co-sponsors" of Doolittle's bill - Capitol Hill lingo for strong advocates of a measure. Pombo and Rep. Wally Herger, R-Marysville, had previously stated their intention to do the same.

Opponents of the dam were not surprised by the accord, which they asserted will have no effect on the measure's ultimate fate in Congress.

"While we'll have to look at the bill, the details don't matter," said Ralph De Gennaro, executive director of Taxpayers for Common Sense, a Washington watchdog group. "Agreement amongst Sacramento congressmen does not persuade the rest of the Congress that has to pay for this thing."

Ron Stork of Friends of the River said the congressmen "are still asking the rest of the country for a billion dollars to put a concrete monolith on an earthquake fault upstream of Sacramento over the heavy opposition of environmentalists in a tough budget climate."

The central theme of the compromise differs little from legislation Doolittle unveiled last month. The new language was not available because it must be written into legislative form over the next few days.

It calls for the construction of a flood-control dam that would contain a lake only during flood threats. Located on the north fork of the American River, the dam could be expanded into a multipurpose facility that retained a permanent lake during construction or at any time thereafter with no further congressional approval.

Expandability is Doolittle's major priority, because a multipurpose dam would provide water and electrical power to his fast-growing district. In 1992, he opposed Auburn dam legislation by Matsui and Fazio because, he asserted, it would not have allowed for the dam's expansion.

But Fazio, reflecting on the delicate nature of the compromise, warned that the expansion provisions in the latest version could hamper its chances this year.

"I just think the multipurpose aspect of this is in for very, very tough sledding," he said.

At the insistence of Matsui and Fazio, language was inserted to strengthen provisions calling for the continued "reoperation" of Folsom Dam as the Auburn dam is built. Reoperation is the annual lowering of Folsom Lake to provide more capacity to handle storm runoff and snow melt.

Doolittle, who strongly dislikes the reoperation policy, said Sacramento would continue to enjoy at least 100-year flood protection as downstream American River levees are upgraded and the dam is constructed.

But, he stressed, "I anticipate we will have (reoperation) for as brief a period as possible."

The congressmen also agreed to reimburse the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency for the portion of its contribution toward the dam's construction that would pay for features having nothing to do with flood control.

A hearing of the House Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee next Thursday, at which the congressmen are scheduled to testify on behalf of the dam, was the prod that inspired agreement after several months of private discussions between the four lawmakers and their staffs.

METRO

▶ EDITORIALS
▶ OBITUARIES

The Sacramento Bee

Bureaucrats' debate may hamper dam

By Herbert A. Sample
Bee Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Three federal agencies are extending negotiations over a key environmental report on the proposed Auburn dam, a development that could throw an obstacle in the path of congressional approval for the project.

The Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of the Interior last week received a two-month extension from the Army Corps of Engineers, which is undergoing its own internal discussions over whether to recommend the dam.

If the Army corps chooses the dam as the preferred project over objections of the EPA and Interior Department, the dispute is likely to end up before a White House panel for resolution.

The upshot of these procedural maneuverings is that interagency battle

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Dam: Damage to habitat of river canyon is feared

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over the dam proposal could complicate its approval by Congress.

"This means ... that the environmental agencies of the federal establishment are not going to let Auburn (dam) go forward, and that's good news," said Tom Graff of the Environmental Defense Fund, a dam opponent.

Bill Mueller, a spokesman for Rep. John Doolittle, R-Rocklin, said the congressman hopes that failure by the EPA and the Interior Department "to reach an agreement with the corps is an effort to improve the documents and not an effort to frustrate the community's desire to win the flood protections that it needs."

Current law requires the Army corps to let other federal agencies review a study of a flood control project's ecological impact before a final version is issued. If the reviewing agencies find fault with the study, the dispute can be referred to the White House's Council on Environmental Quality.

In the case of the Auburn dam, the EPA and the Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service have issued critical assessments of the corps' environmental impact study, saying a dam would cause unacceptable damage to the American River canyon habitat.

With the EPA's deadline looming and the Interior Department to refer the corps' environmental study to the Council on Environmental Quality, both agencies asked for an extension until May

29. Martin Lancaster, assistant secretary of the Army for civil works, granted the request.

An EPA official said the agency wanted the extension mainly to see whether the corps' top engineer sticks with his tentative decision in February to overrule the Sacramento district engineer's recommendation to build a dam.

Lt. Gen. Arthur Williams, the corps' chief of engineers, said the proposal for a \$950 million dam should be deferred because of the corps' tight construction budget. But he agreed that American River levees should be upgraded.

While Williams' final report will not be ready until June, the EPA should have a good idea of its direction by the end of May, said Richard Sanderson, director of EPA's office of federal activities.

"We recognize the need for flood protection for Sacramento," Sanderson said. "What we're concerned about is the plan (the corps is) offering, whether the detention dam is the right alternative or whether raising the levees and reoperating Folsom Dam is the right alternative."

"Reoperation" of Folsom Dam refers to the lowering of Folsom Lake in late fall to increase the dam's capacity.

If the issue goes to the Council on Environmental Quality, the panel will conduct a two- to three-month review and issue a recommendation that is not binding but is usually complied with.

B2 Wednesday, April 3, 1996 ★ ★

Big taxpayer group blasts Auburn dam

Opposition letter calls plan 'boondoggle'

By Herbert A. Sample
Bee Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — A large national taxpayers organization has announced its opposition to the proposed Auburn dam.

Thomas Schatz, president of Citizens Against Government Waste, in a recent letter to Rep. Thomas Petri, R-Wis., called the \$950 million dam proposal "a boondoggle" and a "blatant rip-off of the American taxpayer."

The nonpartisan and nonprofit group, which has 600,000 members nationwide, joins two other Washington-based watchdog groups in opposing the dam — the National Taxpayers Union and Taxpayers for Common Sense.

The positions taken by the three organizations, two of which issue annual scorecards based on congressional floor votes, could sway lawmakers seeking re-election when the proposal is considered in coming weeks.

But a spokesman for the dam's chief backer in the House, Rep. John Doolittle, R-Rocklin, said the new opposition was a result of "inordinate" attention it gave to arguments of environmental groups. The dam would be built downstream from where the north and middle forks of the American River meet.

"If we were to solve the flood control problem and the water supply problem that Sacramento has independent of Auburn dam, we'd have to spend twice as much and be left with half the flood protection and an unreliable water supply," said aide Bill Mueller.

Jim Bonham, a spokesman for Rep. Robert Matsui, D-Sacramento, said, "I'm sure they don't intend to say that they would rather spend \$10 billion bailing out Sac-

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Like so many other wasteful projects, the Auburn dam has again raised its ugly head.

”

Thomas Schatz, president
Citizens Against Government Waste

ramento after a catastrophic flood than spend \$700 million for an Auburn dam."

Schatz based his group's stance on the dam's cost and the existence of alternatives that "would provide adequate flood control protection." He also noted the dam site is near an earthquake fault.

"Like so many other wasteful projects, the Auburn dam has again raised its ugly head," Schatz wrote to Petri. "Perhaps this time, you should use a wooden stake to eliminate this project."

Petri, the dam's leading opponent in the House, late last week sent a copy of the group's note to other lawmakers, one of a half-dozen dueling "Dear Colleague" letters Petri and Doolittle have distributed in recent weeks.

In response, Doolittle on Monday sent a letter to House members pointing out that Petri supported a 1993 measure to assist victims of Midwest floods but a year later voted against a bill providing emergency aid to earthquake-struck Los Angeles.

The letter did not note that while Doolittle voted against the 1993 flood relief bill, he backed the earthquake relief measure.

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Auburn Dam down, but not out

By DAVID RICHIE
The Press-Tribune

WASHINGTON — Backers of the proposed Auburn Dam still expect a vote on U.S. Rep. John Doolittle's legislation by late summer — despite President Clinton's decision to leave the dam off his list of preferred federal water projects.

"That certainly does not help, but we don't think it will be given much accord," said Kevin Ring, the Rocklin Republican's legislative director.

The dam legislation was introduced April 18 with bipartisan support from all the area's House members. It is a "free-standing bill" and, if approved, it will be added to the package of projects contained in this year's Water Resources Development Act (WRDA).

Ring said that even California Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer — also Democrats — appear to be on-board.

The dam legislation is scheduled for discussion during the week of May 20. The first stop is a water resources/environmental subcommittee of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

The Clinton version of the WRDA legislation includes \$57

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Dam

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million for a project based on an earlier Corps of Engineers alternative for Sacramento area flood control. It would bolster 24 miles of American River levees, raise another 12 miles of levees along the Sacramento River, install stream-flow gauges above Folsom Dam, and make other modifications to the area's flood warning system.

It would also extend the "re-operation" agreement for additional wet month flood storage space in Folsom Reservoir.

Doolittle called the proposal "irresponsible and dangerous."

The coalition of environmental groups arrayed against the dam hailed Clinton's omission of the big dam. They also agreed with the White House view that local interests should pay 50 percent of the costs for flood control. With the Clinton proposal that means approximately \$28.6 million versus about \$50 million for the dam.

Ron Stork, associate conservation director for Friends of the River, has been predicting for months that the total cost of Doolittle's multipurpose project will eventually kill it.

"These guys still need a billion dollars from the rest of the country and they are not going to get it," Stork said a few weeks ago. "Ultimately we are all wasting our time when we deal with this. All they have done is derail flood control for Sacramento."

But, the level of support Doolittle is getting from former adversaries like Sacramento area Democrats Vic Fazio and Bob Matsui has the green groups miffed. It has been an especially long leap for Fazio who, for years, has been telling Auburn Dam backers that the federal government was out of the dam building business.

Dam opponents had been referring to Fazio and Matsui as "horses" just waiting for the rest of the House membership to vote thumbs down on the dam. How-

ever, that tone hardened when Fazio and Matsui signed on as active co-sponsors of Doolittle's dam legislation. American River Coalition spokesman Richard Penney labeled the Sacramento politicians' conduct "outrageous."

"Since politicians and officials in the Sacramento region have been unable to support an affordable and environmentally reasonable flood control plan, it's heartening to see the Clinton administration begin to do just that," Stork said Wednesday.

According to Ring, the federal cost is more like \$600 million, spread out over 10 years, not the \$1 billion discussed by opponents. It is full court press time for the multipurpose dam.

"Doolittle has scheduled half hour meetings with every Republican and now he is doing follow-ups. He has really put on his salesman's hat," Ring said. "I assume Fazio and Matsui have been doing the same thing on the other side of the aisle."

The Sacramento Bee

METRO

★ ★Friday, May 17, 1996

Auburn dam draws EPA fire

Says environment would be damaged

By Herbert A. Sample
Bee Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The federal Environmental Protection Agency made its opposition to the Auburn dam official Wednesday, declaring that building the flood-control facility would be environmentally unacceptable.

In a letter to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the head of the EPA San Francisco office contended the American River canyon habitat that would be flooded at times by the dam is too valuable, and that the damage it would sustain could not be adequately mitigated.

EPA Regional Administrator Felicia Marcus also criticized the project because the corps did not study the environmental impact of expanding the flood-control facility into a larger multipurpose dam.

Dam: Doolittle not fazed

Continued from page B1

While the EPA agreed that Sacramento needs improved flood protection, it concluded the flood-control dam "would have unacceptable, unmitigable effects on unique natural resources," Marcus wrote in urging the corps to dispose of the project.

The corps has identified the Auburn dam proposal as its preferred flood-control project, but top officials have not yet signed off on the proposal.

Should those officials approve the dam, Marcus said, she will recommend that EPA Administrator Carol Browner refer the issue to a White House panel that adjudicates environmental disputes between federal agencies.

Marcus' letter was not unexpected since the EPA already had signaled its unhappiness with the dam proposal. However, the project's difficulties in Congress could be made worse if it becomes the subject of an internal Clinton administration battle.

The interagency tussle could be used as a "convenient excuse" by lawmakers who quietly support the dam but want to avoid its controversies, said Rep. Robert Matsui, D-Sacramento, who wants the project built.

"If a member (of Congress) would prefer not to have to vote on this, this is a way to do that," he said.

But Rep. John Doolittle, R-Rocklin, the dam's chief congressional sponsor, said the EPA letter should have little impact on congressional deliberations.

"The mission of the EPA is narrow," he said. "As elected representatives, however, it is our responsibility to make certain that all factors, including human health and safety, are considered."

Marcus' letter said segments of the American River's north and middle forks are eligible for protection by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The flood-control dam, whose gates would close only when there was a flood threat downstream, temporarily would inundate up to 39 miles of those segments, she said.

"Adequate mitigation for degradation of a unique ecosystem on this scale is simply not feasible," Marcus said.

She also noted that construction of a flood-control dam is likely the first step toward a larger multipurpose facility that retains a permanent lake and combines flood-control and water-supply features. However, she said the corps failed to study the environmental impact of a multipurpose dam as required by federal law.

A recent report by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation about increasing water supplies in the region, including construction of a multipurpose dam, did not adequately study the environmental effect of such a project, Marcus wrote.

It is inconsistent with (federal law) that two federal proposals for virtually the same dam be evaluated in isolation from each other," she wrote.

**AUBURN
SENTINEL**

Friday, May 24, 1996

Auburn dam proposal encounters rough waters

Republican Congressman John T. Doolittle's proposal to dam the American River near Auburn was running into major problems late this week.

Scheduled for a "mark-up" hearing by the House Subcommittee on Water Resources and the Environment in early June, Doolittle's proposal drew opposition from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as well as a cautionary statement from the federal agency that would build the dam, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Felicia Marcus, the regional EPA administrator in San Francisco, opined in a letter to the Corps of Engineers the river canyon and its habitat that would be inundated at times by a detention dam are too valuable for such a project and that the damage they would sustain could not be adequately mitigated.

According to the *Sacramento Bee*, Marcus said portions of the river's middle and north forks are eligible for protection under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and that a flood-control dam, when utilized by shutting its gates, could flood up to 38 miles of those segments.

Doolittle's \$900 million proposal calls for a so-called detention (flood-control) dam that he hopes eventually could be expanded into a multi-pur-

pose facility.

Regarding reports that the Corps of Engineers supports the Doolittle proposal, a top Department of the Army official issued a "clarification" about the situation.

In a May 17 letter to the EPA, Michael L. Davis, a deputy assistant Secretary of the Army for policy and legislation, stated:

"I want to clarify in writing the

Army's position on the American River Watershed Investigation. Specifically, the Army is not recommending construction of the detention dam alternative at this time due to the cost-sharing policy issues and budgetary constraints noted in the draft Chief of Engineers Report and environmental concerns expressed by the public, the EPA and other federal agencies."

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Davis went on to say that if these issues are ever resolved and a detention dam is pursued as a federal project, the Army will grant the EPA 25 days to decide if it wants to refer the matter to the higher-ranking Council on Environmental Quality for decision.

Opponents of the Doolittle dam are predicting that these developments will doom the project for the remainder of this congressional session. They also are predicting that Doolittle will try to "save face" by pushing for funds to continue studying the feasibility of the project.



Auburn Dam still mired in politics

Key House vote ahead for controversial project

BY PAUL ROGERS
Mercury News Staff Writer

The Auburn Dam, a \$1 billion proposal for California's Sierra foothills that supporters say is vital to protect Sacramento against floods but opponents call an environmentally ruinous waste of money, stumbled Tuesday in its first test before the Republican-controlled Congress.

With little debate, the House Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment voted not to include the dam among a key list of federal water projects to be funded over the next two years.

The political battle, though, is far from over as the full House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee is expected to take up the issue Thursday.

As designed by the Army Corps of Engineers, Auburn Dam would be 508 feet high and located in a remote canyon where the Middle and North forks of the American River meet northeast of Sacramento near the town of Auburn.

It would rank as the most expensive dam ever built in the United States. And because it would sit atop an earthquake fault, Auburn Dam would be 400 feet thick at its base for safety reasons, requiring twice as much concrete as Hoover Dam.

The project also would flood 39 miles of river canyons that are popular with whitewater rafters and home to mountain lions, deer and eagles.

In a rebuke to dam backers Tuesday, however, the subcommittee's two ranking members — Republican chairman Sherwood Boehlert, R-N.Y., and James Oberstar, D-Minn. — announced their opposition to the project.

"I'm not convinced that we need to dam that river," said Oberstar. "It is a huge expense and a beautiful river."

But supporters, led by Sacramento-area Rep. John Doolittle, R-Roseville, remained hopeful as a crucial follow-up vote loomed Thursday.

"We're certainly optimistic that it will pass," said Richard Robinson, a spokesman for Doolittle in Washington, D.C. "Con-

'Congress can pay for the dam now or pay much

more later when

Sacramento suffers from a catastrophic flood and needs a federal bailout.'

— A spokesman for Rep. John Doolittle

gress can pay for the dam now or pay much more later when Sacramento suffers from a catastrophic flood and needs a federal bailout."

Congress approved the project in the 1960s.

Construction began but was halted midway in 1975 when a 5.7 earthquake hit nearby and engineers discovered their site was located on the same fault. The dam was redesigned, but mired down in political battles. For 20 years since then, the canyon has sat, an ugly scar crisscrossed with construction roads and scraped to the bedrock.

Doolittle supports the dam, along with Gov. Pete Wilson, Rep. Vic Fazio, D-Woodland and Rep. Robert Matsui, D-Sacramento. They are joined by farmers, who would receive a new source of water, and developers, who would be able to safely build in low-lying areas of Sacramento downstream.

Sacramento, built in a giant flood plain at the confluence of the Sacramento and American rivers, is protected by a system of aging, inadequate earthen levees. If the levees failed during heavy rains — as almost happened in 1986 — water 10 feet deep would swamp downtown streets.

But critics say sufficient flood control can be had by raising and strengthening the levees without a dam.

On Thursday, Doolittle said he will appear before the full House committee, chaired by Rep. Bud Shuster, R-Pa., an Auburn Dam supporter, and seek to add the project to the Water Resources Development Act of 1996.

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W E E K E N D

Auburn Dam falls to budget ax

Republican support wanes

By Patrick McCartney
 Tribune Staff Writer

A key House committee on Thursday voted against building a controversial dam on the American River near Auburn, instead approving \$57 million in funds to strengthen levees near Sacramento.

On a 35-28 vote, the House Public Works and Transportation Committee defeated a proposal by Rep. John Doolittle to add the \$949 million project to the Water Resources Development Act. The vote had been postponed two weeks, with critics of the dam contending that Doolittle was trying to rally support for the project.

If built, the Auburn Dam would have been 50-foot high, and flooded more than 40 miles of the American River.

Shortly after the vote, Doolittle, R-Roseville, said he was unlikely to try to override the vote on the House

Dam

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floor, citing "significant Republican defections" in the committee vote.

"The committee was a pretty accurate reflection of what the picture will be like on the floor," Doolittle said. "In the next week or so, I will visit with the flood control folks in Sacramento to figure out what our best strategy should be. We will regroup, and come back next year."

Doolittle called construction of the dam essential for flood control in the Sacramento area. He described as ludicrous charges that he supports the dam as an aid to development in the area.

Doolittle blamed the defeat on opposition from a coalition of anti-tax activists and environmentalists, as well as a reluctant Clinton administration. The Environmental Protection Agency and Fish and Wildlife both opposed the dam project, while the Army Corps of Engineers failed to support it in a final report released on the day of the vote.

Doolittle said he was upset by a "Top 10" list of reasons to oppose the dam issued by Rep. Sherwood Boehlert, the Republican chair of a Public Works subcommittee that opposed the dam.

Among the list of reasons was the reminder that Congress had defeated a smaller Auburn Dam in 1994, that the dam was opposed by a host of environmental groups, and that "China has already cornered the market on bad dam ideas. (Three Gorges)."

Opponents of Auburn Dam hailed the committee's decision to favor beefing up levees over building the dam.

"We would like to think that this killed it once and for all, that it drove a stake through the heart of Auburn Dam," said Laurie Kemper of South Lake Tahoe. Kemper spent the last week in Washington, D.C. lobbying against the dam on behalf of the Friends of the River. "Sacramento can achieve its flood control with improvements to Folsom Dam and its levees. We don't want to see the North and Middle Fork of the American River be inundated."

The Fresno Bee

Central California's leading newspaper

House committee's vote sinks \$1 billion Auburn Dam project

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO — A congressional committee pulled the plug Thursday on the \$1 billion Auburn Dam, a towering public works proposal intended to reduce the risk of flooding but bitterly opposed by environmentalists.

The proposed 50-story dam, one of the biggest such projects ever, would have affected a 48-mile stretch of the American River. Thousands of acres of canyon land could have been flooded.

Supporters say the dam is needed to reduce the risk of flooding along the river — a risk, they say, that levees alone cannot adequately address.

The U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee voted in Washington, D.C., against adding the project to the 1996 Water Resources Development Act as U.S. Rep. John Doolittle, R-Rocklin, had requested. The vote for the project was 28-35.

Instead, the committee voted 36-16 to add \$57 million for im-

provements to American River levees and to continue operation of Folsom Dam.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had weighed in against the dam, calling the flood safety it might provide an unacceptable trade-off for the environmental damage it might cause.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engi-

neers had disagreed, saying any environmental damage could be mitigated.

Environmental groups were thrilled by the decision.

"Reason and sensibility prevailed today," said Ron Stork of the conservation group Friends of the River. "The House Transportation Committee finally met

a bucket of concrete it didn't like."

But the project had bipartisan support from area congressional representatives.

Gov. Wilson, a Republican who also supported the dam project, blamed a "coalition of narrow interests" for defeating the project.



The Sacramento Bee

\$1.16

B4 Sunday, July 28, 1996

METRO/REGIONAL

Doolittle finds out change is slow

By Herbert A. Sample
Bee Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON - When Republicans won control of the House 20 months ago, many GOP lawmakers who long felt ignored and abused by Democrats believed a new day had blossomed.

So like many Republicans, Rep. John Doolittle of Rocklin immediately set upon an ambitious legislative agenda: Approval of the Auburn dam, relaxation of federal environmental rules and sale of the huge irrigation system that is the Central Valley Project.

To his chagrin, each of these highly controversial initiatives was either defeated or blocked in the GOP-led House.

Doolittle refused to comment on his agenda and its treatment by the 104th Congress. But beyond the particular reasons for the demise of his most important bills, both allies and opponents say one lesson stands out: Change in the



John Doolittle

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No one considered Doolittle's major proposals to be easy sells in Congress, and even his foes acknowledge he worked hard on behalf of the bills. Yet, each one stalled or was defeated.

Doolittle's November rival, Democrat Katie Hirming, charged that his disappointing legislative record was due to his "narrow" views. "I think he came in with what he perceived to be his solution and his agenda ... and what do you know, he couldn't do it," she said.

A number of factors combined to doom the proposals. For one, the Republican push to alter the country's environmental laws skidded off-course after Democratic opposition coalesced and public opinion shifted.

But more specifically, Doolittle pushed controversial and far-reaching legislation with little effort at compromise, his foes claim.

"It became clear to us that they weren't interested in negotiating, (but) in ramming his proposal through," said Joe Nipper, assistant executive director of the American Public Power Association, which opposed Doolittle's

Doolittle: Myriad factors in legislative failures

plans to sell power marketing administrations.

The legislation to change CVP environmental rules "never fully incorporated or really came close to incorporating the urban districts' concerns," said Timothy Quinn, deputy general manager of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California.

But some of Doolittle's allies contend his legislative agenda was the target of unfair opposition claims.

Others said proposals impacting the CVP are always greeted warily by eastern Republicans, making it difficult to win immediate action in Congress.

Of the 13 bills Doolittle introduced, one was enacted. Two amendments he sponsored were folded into larger bills and became law.

Doolittle did succeed in other areas. When a gate at Folsom Dam collapsed last year, forcing repair workers to close a major road that crossed the top of the dam, he prodded federal officials to minimize the blockage.

"He picked up the phone and talked to the people who controlled it and said, 'I want this

done,' and it got done," Frost said. Further, his proposal to alter CVP environmental rules prodded the Clinton administration to adopt some changes in the way the project is operated. And even foes regard Doolittle as a civil and considerate chairman.

"He has strong views, but he's willing to let you state your views," said Rep. Peter Defazio of Oregon, the top Democrat on Doolittle's subcommittee who opposed many of the Republican's bills. "He's been very fair."

If Doolittle is to do better next year, some of his allies urged he model his efforts after a coalition of farmers, environmentalists, urban water users and others who negotiated a state water bond measure onto the November ballot.

"The long-term resolution of many environmental and water problems will have to be based on consensus-based process," said Rep. Calvin Dooley, D-Tulare County, who backed much of Doolittle's agenda. "Neither side in the next decade will have the political clout to ram through a one-sided proposal."

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