

# Activists protest Wilson strategy to fund water projects

## Maneuver decried as effort to subvert CalFed group

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California environmentalists are up in arms over Gov. Wilson's effort to persuade House of Representative Speaker Newt Gingrich to add money for two major water projects into the fiscal 1999 federal budget.

The source of their alarm is a confidential memo from Wilson's Washington lobbyist, Scott Cameron, to Michael Kahoe, his point man for water politics in Sacramento.

The memo outlines a strategy for obtaining more than \$100 million to increase the size of the reservoir at Shasta Dam and create an underground water bank near Mendota in the San Joaquin Valley.

The memo notes that because the idea arrives late in the congressional budgeting process and because the projects are only theories at this point, "it would be hard to defend (them) as emergencies."

Consequently, Cameron writes, "we would also have to get the speaker to brute-force these projects" into the supplemental appropriations bill — and mount a force-draft lobbying effort with key legislators, while organizing "a positive-press spin."

In a follow-up letter, Wilson wrote to Gingrich asking for the start-up money for the two projects. Both projects, Wilson wrote, "pose few environmental complications ... and very importantly will simultaneously produce greater reliability of water supplies."

Environmentalists and Rep. George Miller, D-Martinez, say the

memo shows that Wilson is trying to subvert CalFed, a group of urban, agricultural and environmental stakeholders brought together by the state and federal governments to forge a long-range compromise on how to share California's water supply.

Indeed, the memo written by Cameron suggests that the governor should "be prepared to counter environmentalists and George Miller cries that this undercuts/preempts CalFed."

Too late.

Rep. Miller, who chaired the Interior Committee when Democrats controlled the House, issued a furious denunciation of Wilson's efforts.

"The memo, when taken together with the letter from the governor, have the potential to destroy the CalFed process," Miller said. "We've spent a lot of time building trust among groups that for the last 25 years haven't talked to one another ... and to have the governor take this kind of unilateral action ... I think calls into question the whole future of CalFed."

A spokesman for the governor, Rod Love, said Thursday that Wilson is an ardent supporter of CalFed and an equally ardent believer that "there needs to be additional off-stream storage capacity for California ... to insure a water supply for its growing population."

Jason F. Tier, manager of the Central Valley Project water contractors' association, said "the Cameron memo might have set back our efforts."

In a letter sent to Wilson and to Bruce Babbitt, federal secretary of the Interior, environmentalists said the proposals are particularly troubling because CalFed has not yet identified an alternative for increasing water supplies in the state, nor has it completed an environmental-impact report.