

Opening Statement
The Honorable Jared Huffman
Subcommittee on Water, Power, and Oceans
Thursday, November 30, 2017
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 4419

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Today we're back to debate a familiar bill that threatens our nation's fishing industry and attempts to undermine our nation's bedrock environmental laws. Folks watching today's hearing can be forgiven if they get déjà vu.

- In 2014, we debated the previous version of this bill, H.R. 5412, at length. That bill was resoundingly opposed by the Democratic members of this Committee and the Obama administration.
- The next year, we saw this bill on the House floor as part of H.R. 2898, which once again, was jammed through the House over the strong objections of House Democrats and the Obama administration.
- Most recently, we debated provisions of this bill on the House floor in July during floor debate on H.R. 23, which includes a version of this bill. That bill, once again, was resoundingly opposed by Democrats and some Republicans.

Yet, House Republican leadership continues to push this bill. Some things never change, I guess. Another thing that isn't changing, is the reality that this bill is dead on arrival in the Senate and will never become law.

This is true despite the fact that House Republican leadership is now proposing to combine this bill with a provision to authorize the latest phase of the Yakima Basin Water Enhancement Project, which some Democratic members have been working to advance in some form. This cheap political stunt is obviously doomed to fail. It's like a reverse "poison pill": adding a spoonful of sugar in the hopes that we will ignore the toxic effects of the rest of the bill. The only thing it *will* accomplish is wasting everyone's time. I hope we can move past these petty political games soon, which people watching today are rightfully sick of.

Moving on, I do want to address the claim from supporters of this bill that environmental laws like the National Environmental Policy Act block new dam construction. This claim, simply put, is false. But you don't have to take my word for it.

Recently, President Trump was fact checked when he claimed that projects like the Hoover Dam were "built in five years" because they didn't have to go through the years of permitting and regulations that current infrastructure projects require. When independent fact checkers at *the Washington Post* evaluated this claim, they awarded the President's claim 3 Pinocchios, which is the rating for statements that include "Significant factual error and/or obvious contradictions."

The fact checkers noted that, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, 95 percent of public infrastructure projects are excluded from environmental reviews under current law. They further pointed out that it took 35 years of planning, permitting, negotiation and preparation that to ensure that the Hoover Dam was financially feasible and had public support. This project took many years despite the absence of modern

environmental laws because big, complicated projects take time to plan and finance.

Also, a 2012 Congressional Research Service report found the most likely causes of delay for major infrastructure projects are lack of funding and local and state permitting issues, not environmental laws.

Despite these facts, my Republican colleagues continue to peddle the fiction that we need to gut our nation's environmental laws to build new dams and other infrastructure. I hope we can move on from this phony debate and get to work addressing the real problems on the ground.

One real problem we could address together is the poor health of our nation's fisheries. Many of our nation's iconic fisheries are on the brink of extinction, causing untold harm to thousands of Americans across our country whose livelihoods depend on healthy fish runs. In my own district, some members of the Yurok tribe have even been driven to the brink of suicide, partly because of the demise of salmon populations that have formed the backbone of their tradition and economy for generations. This is truly heartbreaking.

Another problem Republicans and Democrats should work on is ending the push to slash the budgets of agencies in charge of environmental reviews. These budget cuts only make it harder for federal agencies to expedite project reviews, especially in the small percentage of projects that appropriately require a full Environmental Impact Statement under NEPA.

Before closing, I want to highlight that H.R. 4419 includes a new deauthorization provision that directs Interior to deauthorize hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of Reclamation projects. The catch is that this provision exempts large dam projects from deauthorization. This means that the boondoggle Auburn Dam, which will never be built, will not be deauthorized. Instead, water recycling projects that water managers actually want will. Keeping the myth alive that terribly-conceived projects like Auburn can someday be built may score political points in some quarters, but the fact is that projects like Auburn don't pencil out now and never will.

In closing, I share the frustration of many watching today's hearing. I too am sick of the political games and endless debates about the same poison pill bill that has been rejected time and time again. I urge my colleagues across the aisle to move on from this so that we can work together on real solutions that actually have a chance of becoming law.

Thank you, I yield back.