Congressman Jim Costa
Representative for California’s 16th Congressional District

Two-Year Report

Serving the People of the San Joaquin Valley

114th U.S. Congress Report
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Dear Neighbors:

As your Congressman, I have the honor to advocate for and represent you, your family and friends who live in California’s 16th Congressional District, which includes all of Merced County and parts of Fresno and Madera Counties.

Washington, D.C. can be a frustrating place, and it can be hard to decipher what we, as law makers, are actually getting done. Despite the partisanship and periodic gridlock, Congress and the President are working together to build on the successes of our country. I put together this comprehensive overview of some of the highlights of what my colleagues and I accomplished over the past two years for the people of the Valley, California, and our entire nation.

Enclosed you will find selected information on legislation that I am working on or has been enacted into law. While strides have been made to improve our state’s water system, educational opportunities, and veterans’ care, there is undoubtedly room to do much more on behalf of families in the Valley. Every day, I work to make our San Joaquin Valley a better place and improve opportunities for you, the people of the Valley.

In the upcoming 115th Congress, I will continue my efforts to:

- improve water reliability, security and quality for all Californians;
- advocate for increased investment in our nation’s transportation and infrastructure systems;
- work to fix a broken immigration system to make it more reliable and fair;
- reform our tax system to make it less complex and ensure that everyone pays their fair share;
- and reform entitlement programs, like Social Security and Medicare, in a responsible way, so we can protect the promise made to those currently dependent on these programs and ensure their long-term solvency for future generations.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to serve you in our nation’s capital. Please do not hesitate to contact my staff in my Fresno, Merced, or Washington, D.C. offices. We are here to assist you if you ever have a question regarding federal legislation or a federal agency.

Sincerely,

Jim Costa
Member of Congress
Bringing More Water to the Valley

California Water Legislation Enacted into Law – After years of dedication and bipartisan work by the Valley Congressional delegation, in December 2016, the House and Senate passed S.612, the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act, which includes language to assist in reducing the impacts of California’s drought crisis and to build additional long-term drought resiliency.

This legislation is a win for the San Joaquin Valley’s water supply reliability. It includes short-term provisions to increase water supplies next year, like authorizing increased pumping during storms in the winter months and ensuring that science, not intuition, determines when the pumps will operate and at what levels. More water will be captured and delivered to Valley communities and farms as a result of the implementation of this legislation.

Additionally, this legislation authorizes a feasibility study for the Merced Streams Group, and will provide flood protection for the residents of Merced County. The bill also includes language that will provide for Merced Irrigation District to advance funds to complete a study to evaluate raising the spillway gates at New Exchequer Dam, which when complete, will result in an additional 10,000 acre-feet of water annually for Merced Irrigation District’s water supply.

The status quo in California is a result of flawed water policies and five consecutive years of record breaking drought, and current conditions will get exponentially worse if we do nothing. This bill will help to change the status quo and is good for all Californians, farmers, farm workers, as well as the environment.

More information regarding the legislation Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act:

The California drought language includes short- and long-term provisions:

Short-term provisions:

- Delta Cross Channel Gates - Federal agencies must open the Delta Cross Channel Gates for as long as possible consistent with the State Water Board’s orders. This may allow the agencies to open the Gates during the daytime when salmon are often not migrating in significant numbers, which could allow additional water to be pumped without harming fish or water quality.
- Turbidity measures - By taking measures to manage turbidity and protect Delta smelt during the first storm-induced flush of sediment out of the Delta each winter, the agencies can both protect the fish and allow for more steady pumping the remainder of the year.
- 1:1 inflow-to-export ratio, solely for water transfers - Solely for voluntary transfers, sales and exchanges, allows agencies to use a 1:1 “inflow-to-export ratio” for San Joaquin River flows in April and May for the duration of the drought. By stretching water supplies through water transfers, agricultural districts that are short on water can use
transfers to make up for reduced deliveries, while that same “block” of water moving through the Delta can help fish and potentially assist in the restoration of the Delta.

- Expediting reviews of water transfers and temporary barriers - Expedites review of water transfers and temporary barriers in the Delta, which could help move limited water to where it is needed, manage salinity and improve water quality.

- Extended window for water transfers - Extends the window for water transfers by five months, from April 1 to November 30 (currently July 1 to September 30), if the extended transfers can be done consistent with the biological opinions.

- Scientifically Supported Implementation of OMR (Old and Middle River) Flow Requirements - Science based on real-time monitoring governs the level of pumping within the ranges allowed by the biological opinions. The bill requires the agencies to explain why pumping at the high end of the smelt biological opinion would cause adverse effects to fish, if they decide to pump at lower levels.

- Temporary Operational Flexibility for Storm Events - authorizes the agencies to increase pumping during winter storms, so that excess flows from storms may be captured.

- Consultation on Coordinated Operations – Provides for increased transparency during consultation on the biological opinions by soliciting input from water districts and those environmental groups that already participate in implementation of the biological opinions.

**Long-term provisions:**

- $558 million for storage, water recycling and desalination projects.
  - $335 million for water storage projects. – Funding can go to either state-led groundwater or surface storage projects, or to federally owned surface storage projects.
  - $30 million for desalination projects over 5 years.
  - $50 million for competitive grant funding for water recycling, wastewater reuse and reclamation of naturally impaired ground and surface water.
  - $36 million for projects to improve California’s ecosystems, like the acquisition of additional water supplies for the Grasslands Ecological Preserve in Merced County, and additional salmon habitat throughout California.
  - Increases WaterSMART funding authorization by $100 million.

The legislation authorizes the following California water projects:

**Merced County Impacts:**

- The bill authorizes a feasibility study for the Merced Streams Group project that was originally authorized in 1944 and has not yet been completed. Since 1997, 8 floods in the region have caused significant damage to communities in Merced County. This study, when complete, will evaluate and provide recommendations to move beyond the substandard 50-year flood planning to a much higher standard of flood protection.

- Expedited completion of the Lower San Joaquin River flood risk management report.
California funding, reports and projects:

- $1.5 billion in Flood Risk Management funds for the American River and West Sacramento projects
- $20 million in Hurricane and Storm Damage Risk reduction funds to San Diego County
- $70.5 million in Flood Risk Management, Ecosystem Restoration and Recreation funds for the South San Francisco Bay shoreline
- $375 million in Ecosystem Restoration and Recreation funds for the LA River Expedited completion of the report for the Sacramento River Flood Control System
- Authorization of the feasibility studies for the Cache Creek Settling Basin, the Coyote Valley Dam, the Del Rosa Channel, the Mission-Zanja Channel, and the Soboba Indian Reservation

**Groundbreaking of the North Valley Regional Recycled Water Program** - The North Valley Regional Recycled Program will make tertiary-treated recycled water available to the drought-impacted west side of the San Joaquin Valley, south of the Delta. The project will provide a reliable new water supply for prime agricultural lands and wildlife refuges in San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Merced Counties. Upon its completion, as much as 48,000 acre-feet of water could be available to the Del Puerto Water District. This is a regional solution to California’s water crisis and is a terrific example of the innovative approaches that Valley water agencies, municipalities, farmers and sportsmen are using to create additional resiliency to drought in the future. I worked with Rep. Jeff Denham and Senator Dianne Feinstein to secure $75,000 from the Bureau of Reclamation’s Title XVI Water Reclamation and Reuse Program that was used for planning purposes and completion of the environmental documents for the North Valley Regional Recycled Water Program.

**The Dams Accountability, Maintenance, and Safety (DAMS) Act Enacted into Law** - The measure, introduced by Rep. David Valadao and I, will authorize the Bureau of Reclamation to update and modernize our nation’s federal dams when critical safety work is being performed, and increase storage capacity of San Luis Reservoir.
Taking Care of Valley Veterans

The VA Health Center Management Stability and Improvement Act Passed by the House – The legislation, introduced by Rep. Mike Bost (IL-12) and me, would require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) to develop and submit a plan to Congress to hire qualified permanent directors for the medical centers that currently do not have permanent leadership. Before I introduced this legislation, the Fresno VA hospital operated without a permanent director for nearly four years. When VA hospitals are operated without consistent leadership hospital staff and the veterans they serve are put at a disadvantage. This bipartisan legislation aims to enhance health care services provided to veterans by improving management at VA medical centers here in California and across the country. I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Senate and Administration to get this bill passed and signed into law.

Working to Integrate Networks Guaranteeing Member Access Now (WINGMAN) Act Passed by the House – I joined Rep. Ted Yoho (R-FL) and other House colleagues in introducing the WINGMAN Act. This legislation would streamline the benefits claims process for veterans by granting certified congressional staff access to the files they already have permission to possess, eliminating the Department of Veterans Affairs as a middle man between veterans, their families, and advocates working on their behalf. This bill passed the House of Representatives without objection however the Senate was unable to take it up before the end of the year. I look forward to working with my colleagues in the coming Congress to improve veterans’ access to the benefits they earned by enacting this important legislation into law.

Introduced the Hmong Veterans’ Service Recognition Act – As many of us know in the San Joaquin Valley, Hmong men and women from Laos were trained and led by officers from the CIA’s Special Activities Division during the Vietnam War. Tens of thousands of these individuals performed direct missions against Communist forces and North Vietnamese supporters, saving countless American lives. Following the war, thousands of Hmong Veterans resettled across the United States including here in the Valley. In 1975, President Ford signed legislation that granted them legal permanent resident status and in 2000, President Clinton signed the Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act, which allowed Hmong veterans and their families to become U.S. citizens.

Currently burial benefits are available to veterans and members of the U.S. Armed Services, their spouses and dependents, Reserve Officers, Public Health Service Officers, Merchant Mariners from World War II, and the Philippine Armed Forces. The Hmong Veterans’ Service Recognition Act would add veterans who were naturalized under the Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act to the list of individuals eligible for interment at a national cemetery. It is estimated that there are still 5,000 Hmong veterans living in the United States today.

This bill will not change eligibility for burial at Arlington National Cemetery.
Hmong veterans risked their lives fighting side-by-side with American forces in Vietnam and have earned the right to rest as heroes beside their brothers in arms. Granting them the honor of being laid to rest in our national cemeteries, such as the San Joaquin Valley National Cemetery in Santa Nella, is long overdue and demonstrates our nation’s deep gratitude for their patriotic service to our country.

In the 115th Congress, I sincerely hope that Congress and the President enact legislation to appropriately recognize Hmong and Lao veterans.

**Introduced Legislation to suspend efforts to Reclaim California National Guard Bonuses** – I joined with California Representatives in introducing the *National Guard Bonus Repayment and Financial Relief Act*. The legislation would halt the Department of Defense from recouping funds from members of the Army National Guard who, in good faith, received bonuses and education benefits that they were not eligible to receive. While in the aftermath of these revelations Secretary of Defense Ash Carter ordered the suspension of all efforts to collect repayments, Congress needed to act in order to guarantee that he followed through with his stated plan. American service members and their families sacrifice everything for this country. Enacting this legislation would right the wrong committed by bad actors within the Department of Defense and prevent any further harm to our service members and their families. Language passed by Congress included in the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act reflected the intent of our bill. Relief for the victims of these egregious repayments is on the way and I will continue to monitor the Department of Defense’s process for bringing this unfortunate mistake to a just conclusion.
**Keeping Valley Communities Safe**

**Justice for All Reauthorization Act Enacted into Law** – In December 2016, the Justice for All Reauthorization Act was enacted into Law. As co-chairs of the Congressional Victims’ Rights Caucus, Rep. Ted Poe (R-TX) and I introduced this very important legislation. It will strengthen the rights of victims of crime in the criminal justice process, increases access to restitution, and reauthorizes victim notification grants. It also takes steps to reduce the rape kit backlog and expands the use of sexual assault nurse examiners in underserved communities. Additionally, the bill seeks to further reduce prison rape by strengthening the accountability measures in the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), while also protecting *Violence Against Women Act* funding streams that are critical to crime prevention and victim support efforts. These strengthened policies will provide better support for victims of crime throughout the country, especially those who live in rural regions, like California’s San Joaquin Valley.

**California Awarded $10.3 Million for Crime Victims and Survivors in California** – Every year, I lead the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) appropriations letter requesting that the U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies support an increased cap on the money that comes out of the Crime Victims Fund. The cap was raised to $3.042 billion in Fiscal Year 2016. There is an estimated $10 billion in the fund today. In September 2016, I announced that the State of California is the recipient of $10.3 million in VOCA federal grant funding. The VOCA victim compensation grants provide victims with financial assistance for medical care, mental health counseling, lost wages, and funeral and burial costs. Victims’ compensation is essential to ensuring that not one victim of crime goes without care and services. These funds are made available to survivors so they can pay for out-of-pocket costs like medical expenses, counseling services, shelter, and lost wages. Ensuring that the non-taxpayer dollars in the Crime Victims Fund are spent only for victims’ services and compensation has always been and will continue to be one of my top priorities in Congress.

Since 1984, the Victims of Crime Act has provided federal grants to provide essential, often life-saving services for crime victims. The Crime Victims Fund is not financed by taxpayer dollars but by fines, forfeitures, and other penalties paid by federal criminal offenders. By statute, the Fund is dedicated solely to supporting victim services and compensation.
Strengthening Education in the Valley

Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) – The Every Student Succeeds Act replaced the flawed policies in No Child Left Behind. The legislation gives more flexibility to local school districts, improves accountability, and empowers educators. The young people in our Central Valley and throughout the nation are the future of this country, and we must provide the necessary resources and support to educators and administrators to ensure that all students have an opportunity to succeed. The Every Student Succeeds Act includes several key provisions to help states improve low-performing schools, targets funds to at-risk children, helps states increase teacher quality, improve accountability for learning outcomes, and provide funding flexibility to enhance support for students and schools.

Perkins Loan Program Reauthorization Enacted into Law – In December 2015, H.R. 3594, the Higher Education Extension Act of 2015 was enacted into law to extend the Perkins Loan program for two years. The Perkins Loan provides low-interest rate loans to students with severe financial need. This bipartisan bill amends title IV (Student Assistance) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 to extend the authority of institutions of higher education (IHEs) to disburse Federal Perkins Loans to new undergraduate borrowers through September 30, 2017. The extension of this federal loan program is an important step to ensure that low-income students will receive the financial assistance needed to continue their education and pursue a college degree.
Investing in Innovative Health Care Treatments

The 21st Century Cures Act Enacted into Law – In December 2016, the 21st Century Cures Act was signed into law. This legislation authorizes $5.3 billion in spending for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and National Institutes of Health (NIH) to fund cancer research and breakthrough medical treatments. The legislation also provides $1 billion over two years for expanded opioid treatment programs. Additionally, mental health services through Medicaid will be expanded and several mental health programs overseen by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) within the Health and Human Services Department are reauthorized and modified.

The 21st Century Cures Act modernizes and advances the development of new treatments for some of our most challenging diseases. Federal agencies are given the resources and authorizations they need to innovate and ensure that the United States continues to be at the forefront of global health care innovation.

Support for Community Health Centers in the San Joaquin Valley - Livingston Community Health and Golden Valley Health Centers in Merced County and Camarena Health in Madera provide quality, affordable health care services to residents who live in rural communities throughout the Valley. I strongly support the authorized funding in the Affordable Care Act (ACA) for community health centers like these. Community health centers provide a full range of primary care, preventative care, and supportive services to an underserved population, including migrant and seasonal farm workers.
Recognizing Immigrant Communities in the Valley

Working to Keep Families Together and Protecting DACA Recipients – I joined 110 of my House colleagues in sending a letter to President Barack Obama urging him to do everything he can to safeguard the personal identifying information of DACA enrollees. Congress and the President should explore every option to ensure that DACA recipients and DREAMers are protected. In the 115th Congress, we must work together on bipartisan policies to keep families together and fix our nation’s broken immigration system.

Visited Armenia for the First Time this Summer – Visiting Armenia was a special experience that I will always hold dear and never forget. The people of Armenia reminded me of the families I had the pleasure to grow up with in California’s San Joaquin Valley, and being in Armenia truly felt like home. Highlights of the four-day trip included visiting the Armenian Genocide Memorial and laying flowers at the Eternal Flame, receiving a blessing from the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, His Holiness Karekin II, and speaking to students and faculty at the American University of Armenia. Additionally, I had the opportunity to meet with the President, Foreign Minister, and President of the National Assembly. We discussed the need for Congress and the Administration to appropriately recognize the Armenian Genocide and ways, through trade, education, and our shared culture, that the United States and Armenia can continue to build our relationship.

Urging the President to Recognize the Armenian Genocide – In 2015, we recognized the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. It is high time for the Armenian Genocide to be acknowledged worldwide. I will continue to take an active role in urging Congress and the President to go on record recognizing this atrocity once and for all.

The U.S. Postal Service Commemorates Diwali with a Forever Stamp - The Sikh festival Diwali is an opportunity to celebrate new beginnings and hope. The new Diwali Forever Stamp was first issued at the dedication ceremony at the Consulate General of India in New York on Wednesday, October 5, 2016. The US Postal Service receives around 40,000 suggestions for new stamp ideas every year from the public, and out of the numerous suggestions, approximately 25 are selected to be made into commemorative stamps by the Postmaster General for circulation. Forever stamps are immune to the future price increase of stamps, no matter when it is bought, and this stamp will be equal in value to the current First Class Mail 1-ounce price.

Joined with My Colleagues in Sending a Letter to Change FIBA Policy – I joined other Members of Congress in sending a letter to the President of the International Basketball Federation (FIBA), Horacio Muratori, urging him to change the policy that requires Sikhs and other players to remove articles of faith, such as turbans, in international competition. At both amateur and professional levels, Sikhs have played sports without a single instance of a turban interfering
with the sport, including at the Division I college basketball level. It is time for FIBA to follow the lead of other leagues, end this discriminatory policy, and allow observant Sikhs the opportunity to participate in international basketball competitions.
Building a Robust Valley Economy

Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act Enacted into Law – Congress passed bipartisan legislation to reauthorize highway, bridge, transportation safety, and public transit projects at $305 billion and provided $281 billion in guaranteed funding for these programs over the next five years. The passage of the five-year transportation reauthorization bill was a step forward for our country. The legislation helps provide certainty for communities in Fresno, Madera, and Merced and throughout the nation so they can plan and prioritize local transportation projects. While passage of that bill was a positive step in the right direction, the federal government must make greater investments in our nation’s infrastructure. I will continue to work with my colleagues to find appropriate funding mechanisms so we can make long-term investments in our Central Valley and nation.

In June 2015, I joined other Members of the California delegation in sending a letter to the U.S. House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure requesting provisions of great importance to California’s transportation systems. From increasing transit funding to dedicating specific funding for freight projects, many of the requested provisions made it into the final bill.

Key provisions that were enacted into law include:

- Boosting commerce and strengthening our economic competitiveness by providing dedicated funding specifically for freight projects, including freight rail, for the first time.
- Injecting $3.7 billion over five years into bus funding – a 75 percent increase over current levels. This will reduce traffic congestion by providing more public transportation options.
- Authorizing $10.2 billion for intercity passenger rail investment, including Amtrak, while providing $199 million in guaranteed funding to help commuter railroads implement Positive Train Control systems.
- Increasing American manufacturing jobs by strengthening Buy America requirements.

Social Security Fraud Prevention Act passed out of the House – I joined with Rep. David Valadao and other members of the Valley Congressional delegation in introducing the Social Security Fraud Prevention Act. This legislation would prohibit federal agencies from printing an individual’s social security number on a document sent by the mail. If it is necessary to print an individual’s social security on a document, then the federal agency would be required to specify and explain why it is necessary. This legislation would help to limit fraud and identity theft which is something that Americans are victims of too often. I hope this bill is passed by both chambers in the 115th Congress.
Supporting the Valley Agriculture Industry

Repeal of the Country-of-Origin Labeling requirement Enacted into Law – I introduced the Country-of-Origin Labeling Amendments Act of 2015 with my colleague, House Agriculture Committee Chairman Mike Conaway (R-TX). The legislation was included in an Omnibus Appropriations bill which was passed in December 2015. The legislation repeals the requirement for Country-of-Origin-Labeling (COOL) for pork and beef. If Congress did not pass a measure to repeal COOL, the U.S would have faced over $1 billion in harsh trade retaliations by Canada and Mexico. Preventing the implementation of these retaliatory tariffs was imperative to ensure that irreparable damage was not done to the agriculture and manufacturing industries and to the overall economy.

Advocating for Improved Federal Nutrition Programs – During the 114th Congress, the House Committee on Agriculture has done a comprehensive evaluation of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – formerly the Food Stamp Program – titled the Past, Present, and Future of SNAP. During this review, the committee gained a better understanding of the program and the people it is serves. The San Joaquin Valley has a high population of families on the program, and I have advocated that the program is working, but we can do more.

My arguments have supported the Fresno Bridge Academy and their innovative efforts to help families transition off SNAP through a family centered program. The Bridge Academy was selected by the United States Department of Agriculture as one of the ten nationwide Employment and Training programs to participate in a pilot program that I helped create in the 2014 Farm Bill that supports best practices and innovation methods.

As we move into the 115th Congress and begin working on reauthorizing the Farm Bill, I will continue to advocate for expanding the Fresno Bridge Academy and pilot programs like it throughout the country.