

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 23, 2021

The Honorable Debra Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Haaland and Secretary Vilsack:

A catastrophic drought is severely impacting much of the western United States. In fact, as of July 6, 2021, over 93% of the region is classified under “severe drought” or worse according to the U.S. Drought Monitor map.¹ This historic drought has profoundly impacted water supplies in numerous western watersheds and exacerbates catastrophic wildfire risk nationwide. This is a dire situation for many of our constituents, threatening communities, economies, the environment, and our way of life. It is also impacting the availability of food for the region, the rest of the nation, and the world.

In light of inaction by the House Democrat Majority, Republicans held a forum on drought on May 19, 2021, where House Members and local witnesses proposed comprehensive solutions to combat the current drought and to better prepare for future droughts. Some of these solutions included short-term actions, such as emergency funding, increased flexibility for water transfers that are currently limited due to the Endangered Species Act, and federal and state disaster declarations; and long-term solutions, including rehabilitation of current water storage projects and development of new projects, improved forest management to prevent wildfires, and the reduction of regulatory burdens. Subsequent to the Republican drought forum, House Natural Resources Democrats held an oversight hearing on drought, but they have failed to advance any meaningful, multi-layered legislative solutions to address the western drought crisis.

We remain committed to working across the aisle with the Biden Administration to mitigate this and future droughts. However, we are concerned that the Biden Administration lacks a comprehensive plan. This is especially troubling when the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, an agency within the Department of the Interior, is charged with delivering water in 17 western states to more than 31 million people. The agency’s projects also provide water to one out of five Western farmers to irrigate 10 million acres of farmland that produce 60% of the nation's vegetables and 25% of its fruits and nuts.²

For example, on April 21, 2021, the Biden Administration announced the formation of an “Interagency Working Group” to address the worsening drought conditions in the West. Chaired by both of you, the Interagency Working Group was tasked “to help coordinate across the federal

¹ <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/CurrentMap.aspx>

² <https://www.usbr.gov/main/about/>

government, working in partnership with state, local, and Tribal governments to address the needs of communities suffering from drought-related impacts.”³

Since then, House Republicans have questioned Interior Department officials time and again in hearings to receive answers on what proposals or solutions the Biden Administration and its Interagency Working Group are developing and how we can work together to combat the western drought crisis. Instead, we have not received concrete answers or responses that were promised to our questions in writing.⁴ As a result, we and many of our constituents are left with the perception that this Administration has no comprehensive drought plan and that the Interagency Working Group announcement was nothing more than a window-dressing exercise for the press.

We hope that it is not the case.

As such, we request a briefing no later than July 28, 2021, that will provide us detailed insights into the Administration’s plan to address the drought crisis and what the Interagency Working Group has done and plans to do to provide relief during this time of need for so many. The Americans we all represent deserve nothing less than common sense solutions and expect the executive and legislative branches to work together expeditiously to find these solutions.

Sincerely,



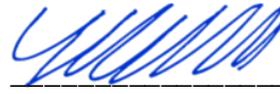
Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



Bruce Westerman
Member of Congress



Kevin McCarthy
House Republican Leader



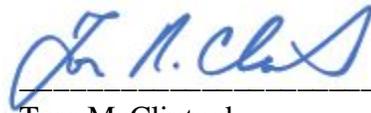
Mike Garcia
Member of Congress

³ <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/white-house-launches-drought-relief-working-group-address-urgency-western-water-crisis>

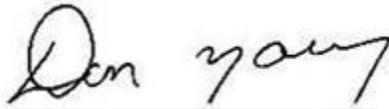
⁴ Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife hearing on “The Status of Drought Conditions Throughout the Western United States” on May 25, 2021 and legislative hearing on June 29, 2021.



David G. Valadao
Member of Congress



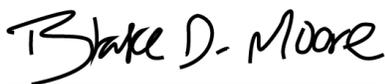
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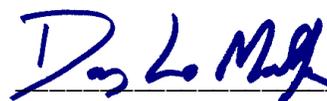
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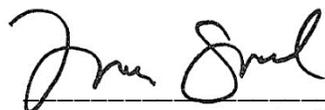
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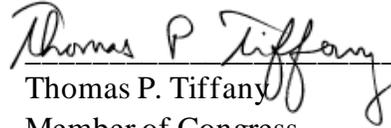
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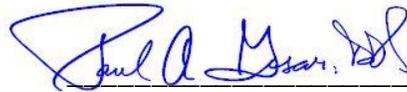
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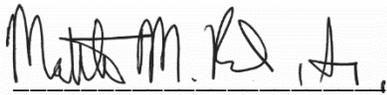
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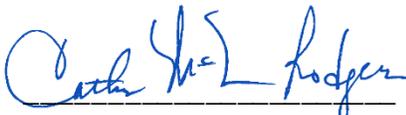
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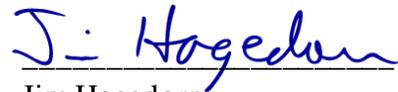
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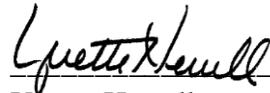
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