

From the Offices of former Senator Barbara Boxer and Speaker Emeritus Fabian Núñez

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Top Environmental Leaders – former Senator Boxer and former Speaker Núñez – Call for State Approval of Huntington Beach Desalination Project

Sacramento, CA – The proposed Huntington Beach desalination project received a significant boost today as two of the country’s top environmental leaders called on state regulators to immediately approve the project, which would provide Orange County with 50 million gallons of fresh drinking water per day from the Pacific Ocean.

Former Senator Barbara Boxer (D), considered to be one of the strongest champions of environmental protection in the history of the US Senate, along with former Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez (D), the author of California’s landmark legislation to curb climate change, are asking state leaders to finally approve the Huntington Beach project, which has been mired in bureaucratic red tape for over a decade.

“The Huntington Beach desalination project is a positive and critical response to the severe impacts of climate change in California,” said Boxer. “The five-year drought that we experienced between 2012 and 2016 caused great suffering and I saw it first hand; it turned our farmers against our fishermen and cause anxiety for all our families. We should and must respond in an environmentally sound way, not with damaging large dams or importing more water.”

“As a long time proponent of desalination, who wrote the desalination provisions in the last federal water bill in 2016, I urge all the state administrative agencies to move forward on the Huntington Beach proposal that has been languishing for over a decade, resulting in nearly 220 billion gallons of lost water,” said Boxer.

“One year of good rainfall doesn’t mean we can sit back and not prepare for our future, climate change, and the next drought,” said Núñez. “The Huntington Beach desalination project will be the most technologically-advanced, environmentally-friendly desalination plant in the world. This is what makes California beautiful – we use our ingenuity and innovation to solve problems and protect our planet.”

While the Huntington Beach project has long been supported by labor unions, the business community, civil rights groups, and some environmentalists, the endorsements from Boxer and Núñez are the strongest environmental credentials the project has received to date.

Boxer, who retired from the US Senate earlier this year, has an impeccable environmental record. She led the 2003 Senate floor battle to block oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and she authored the National Oceans Protection Act (NOPA) of 2005. She has been honored by the California League of Conservation Voters with a Lifetime Achievement Award, as well as by the National Resources Defense Council and the Environmental Working Group.

Núñez is considered one of the top Latino leaders in the nation and authored AB 32 (California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006), the precedent setting climate change legislation that has become a blueprint for other states and the U.S. Congress in addressing environmental challenges. The landmark law established a comprehensive, market-based program to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. Since its passage, the state has cut pollution by nearly 24 million metric tons, and low-carbon alternative fuels have displaced 2 billion gallons of gasoline in the past two years alone.

The proposed Huntington Beach Project will be the first large-scale desalination facility in the world to include 1mm (1/25th inch, approximately the thickness of a credit card) slot width seawater intake screens and have a through-screen water velocity of less than 0.5 feet per second in an open-ocean setting. The plant will also include state-of-the-art diffuser technology that will ensure that the salinity level in the plant's seawater discharge meets the State Water Board's stringent new receiving water quality requirements. These technologies will ensure the protection of marine life.

In addition, the Huntington Beach plant will be the first large-scale water treatment plant in California to be 100% carbon neutral. Poseidon Water, the plant's developer, has also proposed a plan to the California State Lands Commission offering funding to restore and maintain the Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve, providing much needed funding for the restoration and maintenance of one of California's last remaining large-scale wetlands.

The project will produce 56,000 acre feet per year (50 million gallons per day) of locally controlled, drought-proof drinking water that will reduce Orange County's need to import water from Northern California and the Colorado River. The Huntington Beach Project is the single largest source of new, local drinking water supply available to the region and is identified in County water planning documents as a planned future water supply.

The next step in the approval process will be at the California State Lands Commission in August, followed by a hearing at the Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board, and finally, the California Coastal Commission.

“As someone who has always fought to protect the environment, I urge the state to quickly approve this project,” said Núñez. “Not only do we need to find new sources of locally controlled water, we need to show our residents that we want projects that make sense, like the Huntington Beach desalination facility.”

“I am proud to team up with Fabian, the co-author of California’s climate change legislation, to encourage a smart, state-of-the-art plant that responds to one of the most pressing issues of our time,” said Boxer. “Combined with the fact that it is carbon neutral and ensures the continued beauty of the Bolsa Chica wetlands, support of this project should be a no-brainer.”

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