

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF CONGRESSMAN JOE BACA, CA 43

Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources' Subcommittee on Water & Power

Consideration of H. R. 4252, The Inland Empire Perchlorate Ground Water Plume Assessment Act.

June 9, 2010

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow , Ranking Member Sam Brownback and Members of the Subcommittee on Water & Power. I am U.S. Representative Joe Baca from the 43rd District in California. I thank you for your time today. I am pleased to present testimony on behalf of H.R. 4252, the *Inland Empire Perchlorate Ground Water Plume Assessment Act*.

I want to take the time to thank all my colleagues in the House of Representatives, for their bipartisan support of this bill. In addition, I commend the City Council of Rialto and their Perchlorate Task Force, City Council Member Ed Scott and Rialto Mayor Pro tem, Joe Baca Jr, for their hard work and dedication in protecting families.

I would also like to thank Chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, Representative Nick Rahall, and Ranking Member Doc Hastings, my friend and Chairwoman of the House Water & Power Subcommittee, Grace Napolitano, and Ranking Member Tom McClintock for their support of this legislation.

H.R. 4252 directs the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study of water resources in the Rialto-Colton Basin in the State of California. Over the last few decades, the City of Rialto has come to realize that the water from over 20 wells has been contaminated by perchlorate. Perchlorate, a rocket fuel additive, is an unstable organic compound that has been found to be harmful to humans because it interferes with thyroid functions. Those at the greatest risk are pregnant woman and infants.

I am very familiar with water contamination. My family lives in the City of Rialto. My children, friends and close neighbors know what it is like to live with water that is contaminated. When we first learned that our water was not safe to drink, we were scared. We wondered how long the water had been contaminated, and we worried about the potential damages caused to our health. We were nervous because we drank the water, cooked with the water, and bathed our children with the water. I drafted this bill to make sure that other families in neighboring cities will not have to suffer through the same.

We are already suffering enormous hardships in the area. 17.4% of these citizens live below the poverty line. We are ranked third highest in the nation in rate of foreclosures, and the unemployment rate has been in double digits for far too long.

In this area, there is a plume of water that has very high levels of perchlorate. My bill requests that the plume in the Rialto- Colton Basin is studied. Plumes are underground pockets of water, some are pools, that often travel like little underground rivers. We know that the contaminated water in this

plume is traveling underground. We do not know how big the plume is, or how fast the water is moving. We need to know more about the plume in order to permanently fix the problem.

The research established from the study in H.R. 4252 ensures that the problem will be identified. As we all know, a study by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) is not something done lightly. It is an intense research endeavor. As the nation's largest water, earth, and biological science and civilian mapping agency, the USGS collects, monitors, analyzes, and provides scientific understanding about natural resource conditions, issues, and problems. The diversity of their scientific expertise enables them to carry out large-scale, investigations and provide impartial scientific information to resource managers, planners, and other customers. The USGS study will reduce the perchlorate problems in my area that have caused heartache, frustration and fear.

Fortunately, under the City Council of Rialto's Zero Tolerance Policy, the City does not blend any detectable levels of perchlorate into its water system. Rialto is making sure its water is safe by conducting well-head treatment, but what about the cities that do not have this policy or may lack the treatment facilities to clean their water? We are very familiar with the wealth of water problems in California. Apart from those problems, water contamination is one that can be prevented.

I, respectfully request for your support of this legislation, not because it is a California issue, but because it is a national issue.

Commissioner Connor, from the Department of the Interior, stated that the directives in this bill are within the USGS jurisdiction. The USGS has found that groundwater constitutes about 79 percent of the drinking-water supply in the entire Inland Empire. A study by the USGS in this area is long overdue.

We have learned that perchlorate contamination began in the 1940s through actions of the U.S. military, continued into the 1960s through the work of U.S. defense contractors, and was made worse by firework companies. Some cities in the area discovered high levels of perchlorate contamination in the drinking water in 1996. Since this time the USGS has not made the plume a priority. Water managers need to know the source, fate, and movement of perchlorate within the Rialto-Colton Basin and adjacent basins in order to effectively mitigate the contamination. That is why I drafted this bill and why I am grateful that we are here today.

In the Administration's written statement regarding this legislation, they indicated that the citizens relying on water from the Rialto-Colton basin would have to compete with "other Administrative priorities" for funding. The message you will send to the USGS by supporting HR 4252 will be that all families deserve clean drinking water. Families that rely on drinking water from the tap should not have to drink contaminated water. When someone contaminates the only source of drinking water for a community, the issue takes on national significance.

HR 4252 moves beyond finding those at fault. We now need to know and fully appreciate the extent of the damage. We must do this to help isolate the problem and prevent other cities from suffering. The contaminated plume is moving and many other areas will suffer. The hot-spot for the contamination is in Rialto, California. In 2009, this area was designated a Super Fund Site. This fact proves that the problem is severe because it is very difficult to obtain this designation.

The Superfund designation will help take care of the hot spot, but what about the water traveling underground in the plume? What about the other cities? The contamination is spreading and no one

knows exactly how much of the contamination is moving or exactly where it is going. Well-head treatment alone will not solve the problem because the contamination is in the ground.

The Rialto-Colton basin has a plume that is contaminated by TCE, perchlorate and other harmful chemicals that are traveling underground. Without treatment, the water is dangerous. I fear for communities that do not have well-head treatment facilities.

The study will identify the extent of damage underground. The bill does not violate PAYGO requirements, but serves to notice and highlight that there is a plume in the Rialto-Colton basin that must be reviewed. We have an opportunity to be proactive.

I want to thank Rialto City Council Member Ed Scott for coming in September of 2009 to testify in support of HR 4252 during the House Water & Power hearing. Mr. Scott spoke not only for his residents in a City of 96,000 people but also the approximately **400,000** residents who reside in the neighboring cities and are affected by chemicals which have polluted the Rialto-Colton Basin.

I also want to thank the Association of California Water Agencies for their letter in support of this legislation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to stress that the USGS has the scientific know how needed to help us provide clean water to families living in the area. Those in other states will benefit from the knowledge gained. They will learn more about underground plumes that are contaminated with perchlorate. I appreciate the opportunity to talk to you today. This concludes my written statement. I am pleased to answer any questions you may have.