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## **Ken Salazar: Water a 'ticking time bomb' for California**

**The U.S. Interior secretary discusses water infrastructure and climate change legislation with Times editors and reporters.**

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*Below are excerpts from a conversation Monday morning between U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and Times reporters and editorial board members.*

**Dan Turner, L.A. Times:** I know that you've been involved in the climate bill talks. All I hear about that is they've jettisoned cap and trade and they're looking for some other way of pricing carbon. Can you talk at all about what the prospects are?

**Ken Salazar:** Nothing is easy. I mean, the votes you saw yesterday on healthcare show how difficult it is to get things done in Washington these days. So we don't underestimate the kind of challenge that we have, but the president has been very clear from the first day -- which I have been a part of his team helping pull this together -- is we need to address energy and climate change and do it in a comprehensive manner. And the principals that really drive us are ones that are old but timeless, and they are national security -- we need to find a way of moving forward to a new energy future, we can't be as dependent as we have been on the Middle East and Venezuela and other places where we get our oil from.

Secondly, the economics of it. We are sending 700 billion to \$1 trillion overseas for the oil that we're buying. It creates an economic dislocation as we transfer all this wealth from America to those places. So a new energy future will help us, in our view, create jobs here, as we're seeing already here in places in California.

And third, it's about clean air and dangers of pollution and what that's doing to our planet. As I see from that last point from the perch that I have as the secretary of the Interior, I know Glacier National Park will not have any glaciers by the year 2020; I know that Pelican Island, the first wildlife refuge which President Roosevelt declared in 1903, is now almost totally submerged by the rising sea; I know that in the Great Lakes, Lake Superior and the Apostle Islands, which is one of our national parks, is now seeing the surface of that lake on average being five degrees warmer than it was even 30 years ago. So the issue is not going to go away, and there are compelling imperatives for us to address it.

Now how exactly we will end up with the Congress to work on this issue, we still don't know. There's great optimism that the tri-partisan, I've heard as they call it, which my former colleagues

Sen. [John] Kerry and [Joseph] Lieberman and [Lindsay] Graham, have been working on, might eventually create the window of opportunity for us to still be able to deal with energy....

So it's not over; we spent a lot of energy, all of us who are a part of the Obama team, working on healthcare because it is an important moral imperative on the part of the president. We're all part of that team. In the same way, energy and climate change are very important issues for us, and we'll continue to work on it. There are some things that we can do through our executive powers. I mean, the work we're doing on renewable energy, some of that interface is with Congress and that they have provided funding for some of these projects. But overall what we have been doing, essentially, through moving forward, for example, on solar energy, where we have a programmatic environmental impact statement on solar energy. We have set aside the thousand square miles and are looking at 24 solar study areas within those thousand square miles across the southwest. I mean all those things, we're moving forward; we're not waiting, we're moving forward through the department.

### **California's water infrastructure**

**Turner:** You started out talking about California's water supply issues: It's pretty clear that nothing is settled there. I think it's deferred for year because we got a ton of rain this year, but the most recent thing of course is the National Academy of Sciences report, which everybody is claiming supports their point of view because it's kind of vague. Is there a future solution to this that you can see coming? Is there any way of resolving this, or are we just going to have another massive battle over this next year?

**Salazar:** I think that what's important is that people be focused in on the longer term issue as opposed to the year-by-year issue. This year was -- the thing was kept together with bail wire and tape, and we still don't know whether or not, frankly, we're going to be at a point where we're going to avoid the crisis for this year. We hope that we will be able to do that, but we're still not certain.... A lot of it depends on what happens with precipitation now during the month of March and going into April.

But having said that, the big problem that California faces -- and it's not new, it's faced it for a very long time -- is that you essentially have a system that was built to accommodate needs that were much lesser than we have today. And you have environmental values in the [San Francisco] Bay Delta area that essentially show an ecosystem that is in collapse. And so we need to have a comprehensive plan that restores the San Francisco Bay Delta, and at the same time addresses the water supply functions of the bay delta within whatever constraints ultimately are agreed upon.

Now, there'll be pain. I think there are things that are going to have to be done now within the California water system to try to deal with this issue over the long term, but a first step is for us to work with California to come up with a bay delta conservation plan and to make that a reality. And it's not going to be easy. It's taken 20 years to try to pull something together on the Everglades, but today the Everglades is really ... a world heritage site, it is an ecosystem which we can be very proud of. We have brought together all the federal family and all the state

agencies and the nonprofits and all the stakeholders who are moving forward very fast on the restoration of a very complex ecosystem, which is most of southern Florida. There's no reason why we can't do the same thing here in the bay delta, but it's going to take a tremendous amount of energy and commitment on the part of California, the water users, the environmental community, as well as the federal family....

We know it's a very complex task, and we know we may not succeed. But we also know that if we fail, you essentially will continue to have the same water wars that have faced the north and south forever, and they're only going to get worse, because as the bay delta continues to degrade, because of all the stressors on the delta, including the invasive species and water quality and all the rest of the issues there, the problem isn't going to get any better....

**David Hayes, Interior deputy secretary:** I think this year is a very important year, actually. It's clear, as Ken was saying, that we've been doing band-aid stuff here since we came in last year; it was the third year of a drought. This year we still have the vestige of the drought.... And what Ken was saying basically was an overburdened system, clearly.

So we have the bay delta conservation planning effort going ahead. The governor just yesterday pointed folks to the delta leadership group stewardship council. I think we have the opportunity to put together the outlines of a long-term plan that will be truly massive restoration -- environmental restoration of the delta -- and a way to get water through that will be more reliable and not as damaging to the delta. And I think we're going to spend a lot of time on the long-term this year. We're so anxious to get away from the day-to-day work we've had to do here because it's been distracting, frankly, of the long-term.

**Eddy Hartenstein, L.A. Times:** What reason is there for hope that it just won't degrade? I mean, this is kind of a movie we've all heard here before, where it's the story about the two greatest liars on the face of the Earth first meeting. And the first guy says, "Hi, I'm from Washington and I'm here to help." And the guy from Sacramento says, "So glad that you're here," right? So what's different? Why do you think it will be different this year? You said it's an important year.

**Hayes:** Well, it's the last year of the Schwarzenegger administration, and he has put a lot of stock in his water legacy. He has an experienced team; [California Department of Water Resources Director] Lester Snow is a very big player, incredible player. And you're building off the momentum of what the California Legislature did last fall, with their comprehensive statute. And you have some of the big water players, like Metropolitan Water District, I think recognizing that they've been at this now two or three years. This bay delta conservation planning effort has been -- I don't know what they've invested, \$150 million in it already? Something like that. It's been a big, big effort to sort of frame the big issues, and it's coming together, and it coincides with our strong interest. I think most of the players are tired and see the fact that we cannot win by dealing with these short-term issues. Even the big [agriculture] folks are recognizing that this is a zero-sum game.

So we may be wrong, but we're going to put a lot of investment in this year into trying to frame the issue, develop public support for a big-picture fix, work with Sen. Feinstein, Sen. Boxer and

others, the whole delegation, to think about how to ... build public support for an Everglades-type resolution of this water system.

**Salazar:** Eddy, just a point in answer to that question. You know the fights between San Francisco and others. It was very interesting to me to be able to get people like [Rep.] George Miller and [Rep.] Jim Costa, [Rep.] Dennis Cardoza, Barbara Boxer, Dianne Feinstein and Congressman [Mike] Thompson, other members of the California delegation all in one room. It's happened not just once, it's happened several times during this year. It's the first time that they do that. Fifty years of battle, and these are battles between Democrats. They're in the same room, working with us because they recognize that we need to get it together....

**Hartenstein:** What do you think is the message to our readers, voters, residents of California to get behind this? What's the elevator speech to them as to why now and why get it together?

**Salazar:** I would say that the people of California recognize that water is the lifeblood of their communities, both for environmental purposes as well as for water supply. And the economy is going to go to hell in a hand basket in California unless something happens that is credible with respect to the water supply issues -- north, south and the bay delta. And for those in California who have been through the economic pain of the last year and a half in this great recession, there is going to be huge pain that will continue economically if we are not able to deal with these water supply issues in California.

There are also huge hazards. I've seen the probability of what our United States Geological Survey says about the next big earthquake, and what that would mean to the delta and to the levies in the delta in the bay. And if those levies go, what will that mean then to saltwater intrusion and to the whole water supply that so many millions of people now depend on. So I would just say California, the elevator speech: You're sitting on a ticking time bomb, and you better get your act together, because otherwise the bomb's going to go off.

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