

# Merced County Office of Education

Steven E. Gomes, Ed.D., Superintendent



Equal Opportunity Employer

April 13, 2015

The Honorable Adam Gray  
Assembly Member, 21<sup>st</sup> District  
PO Box 942849  
Sacramento, CA 94249-0021

Dear Assembly Member Gray:

## **MERCED COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS SUPPORT OF AB 1242**

I have lived and worked in Merced County for the past 64 years and currently serve as the Merced County Superintendent of Schools. I serve as the educational leader of 20 school districts with 55,000 students in grades K-12 and I am currently in my 43<sup>rd</sup> year in education. Before entering school administration, I taught agriculture science and business for 24 years. I am also proud to say I am the great grandson of a Merced County pioneer from the Westside and I am married to Victoria who is a descendent of a pioneer family from the Eastside of Merced County.

My great-grandfather, Joe P. Gomes Sr. brought his family in a covered wagon and his dairy cows over the Pacheco Pass in 1890 to Gustine, in the Westside of Merced County. Joe P. Gomes risked his family and all he owned to make the journey because he had seen irrigation come to the San Joaquin Valley and it provided a way to raise seven cuttings of alfalfa hay. In Centerville, where he had previously lived, he could only produce one to two cuttings of hay with average rainfall. Greater production of alfalfa hay meant dairymen went from subsistence farming to being able to make a decent living in the dairy business. I, and my entire family, live in Merced County because of the irrigation Crocker and Hoffman brought to the Valley.

I am writing this letter to express my concerns from the viewpoint of an agricultural educator and school administrator. As an agricultural educator, I believe that the State Water Board's requirement to send 35 percent of unimpaired flows on the Stanislaus, Tuolumne, and Merced rivers from February through June annually will be catastrophic to the dwindling groundwater supply. The unimpaired flows of surface water to other areas outside the Central Valley will create greater usage of groundwater and less recharging of the groundwater from lack of that surface water. The continued extraction of groundwater without adequate recharging will have permanent dire consequences. Deep aquifers beneath the surface of the ground hold and transport underground water. Dry aquifers as a result of removing groundwater will collapse and can never serve as holding basins for groundwater again. Several areas in the Central Valley are

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already sinking as a result of this phenomenon. The economic and environmental impacts to the Central Valley will be irreversible.

As the educational leader, my concerns center around all of our schools, particularly those in rural areas, who depend on groundwater as a source of potable water. The rural schools not connected to a city's water supply will be most in danger. Given the wait to drill wells in Merced County is two to three years, a school experiencing a dry well will be forced to transport water to their students and food services. The costs of transporting the quantity of water needed to sustain a school would consume all of the revenue gains those schools have experienced over the last two years.

I doubt my great-grandfather, grandfather, or father would understand how the State Water Board would promote the unimpaired flow of water from the Stanislaus, Tuolumne, and Merced Rivers instead of storing some of that water to maintain the irrigation system and the way of life the pioneers developed more than a century ago. I support AB 1242 and hope all reasonably minded people will as well.

Sincerely,



**STEVEN E. GOMES, ED.D.**  
Superintendent of Schools

SG/lw