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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Governor's water priorities all wrong; He fails to recognize basic water needs while pushing billions for pet water projects

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Sacramento, CA – Governor Schwarzenegger revealed his flawed priorities for water in California when he vetoed the Human Right to Water Bill late Sunday night. The bill would have made it the explicit policy of the state of California to ensure that all people have access to safe affordable water for basic human needs, including drinking water. Reflecting the broad-based support for the bill, AB 1242, authored by Assembly Member Ira Ruskin, was co-sponsored by seven organizations including Alliance for Democracy, Community Water Center, Environmental Justice Coalition for Water, Food and Water Watch, San Jerardo Cooperative, Inc., Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry Action Network, California Unitarian Universalist Service Committee and Urban Semillas.

"The Governor had an opportunity to make a statement on the fundamental values of the state of California: that we, as a state, support the right of all people to have clean drinking water," said bill co-sponsor and Co-Executive Director of the Community Water Center Susana De Anda. The Community Water Center works with people in California's Central Valley who do not have clean, affordable drinking water. "It is the state's responsibility to invest the time and money to meet this basic necessity, but Schwarzenegger is basically saying he won't send that message."

"Access to water for basic human needs should be recognized as a fundamental human right. At a time when the state legislature and Governor are focused on water issues, the Governor has chosen to ignore the needs of the over 150,000 Californians who lack access to clean, affordable water," said bill co-sponsor Mark Schlosberg, Western Regional Director of Food & Water Watch.

Many communities and youth across the state came together to work in support of this bill and were able to gather over 10,000 support letters, postcards, and phone calls sent to the Governor's office to make sure he knew how important this bill was for California. "When

it came down to deciding to sign the bill, he ignored the voices of thousands of Californians. Making this bill a law would have been a much-needed step for us here in the Valley. We have suffered for years and no one has paid attention to our drinking water issues. We thought maybe this time our Governor would, but apparently it does not matter that we drink toxic water - I guess he has clean water so he doesn't care that we don't," said Rebecca Quintana from Seville . The drinking water in Seville is contaminated from agricultural fertilizers.

In his veto message, Governor Schwarzenegger cited concerns over "costly and constant litigation" as one of the reasons he did not sign the bill. He also stated that California's state agencies are already committed to the principle of providing safe drinking water, and it is simply a lack of funding that prohibits this goal from being achieved.

Debbie Davis, Policy Director for the Environmental Justice Coalition for Water countered saying, "Communities without safe drinking water should have some recourse. The courts are not ideal, but water is such a basic necessity to human life that people should be given every possible recourse to gain access." Ms. Davis further suggested, "California voters have allocated more than \$13 billion toward bond funded water projects since 1975, more than \$10 billion of that since 2000. That is many times more than the estimated cost to address the known need. Money poorly invested will not get every Californian access to safe, affordable water!"

As Ms. De Anda says, "The Governor is calling for business as usual. Here in the Valley we know business as usual doesn't work. Despite what the Governor would have you believe, the current programs are exposing residents across the state to life-threatening contaminants on a regular basis. It's not so simple as just getting more money for clean drinking water."

Despite Schwarzenegger's proposed solution of "more funding" for existing programs, he has failed to prioritize such funding within his own water proposals. The Governor concluded his veto message by stating the need for a water bond. The last version of the bond contained \$3 billion for water storage projects that will not likely get a single drop of safe water to the communities that need it most. The bond did not include the estimated \$2 billion needed to address known, existing drinking water and sanitation issues throughout the state.

"The Governor is poised to ask California voters to pass another multi-billion dollar water bond, but his veto of AB 1242 says he is not willing to make sure that everyone in California gets an equitable share," said Ms. Davis.

As Mrs. Quintana stated, "The Governor claims that California's water needs are his priority, but this just shows that he means the water needs of special interests, not the people of California. If water was really his priority, he would be addressing the real issue: clean and safe drinking water for California's families. Stop asking us to wait; we need it now."

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