



RANCHO SANTA MARGARITA, CALIFORNIA: In this July 2, 2015, file photo, cars pass by a sign encouraging residents to save water. — AP

CALIFORNIA WATER BOARD FEARS WATER SAVING ABANDONED

FRESNO: New figures Wednesday show Californians' summer water use up by more than a third since the same time last year, making water regulators worry some areas have abandoned drought-time water savings since the state lifted mandatory conservation orders. "We're at yellow alert," said Felicia Marcus, chairwoman of the state Water Resources Control Board, as the board released August figures showing conservation by cities and towns dropping.

Water regulators would be looking closely at the causes for the increased water use, Marcus said. "I'm not ready to go to red alert until we figure it out." California is heading into a possible sixth consecutive year of drought with uncertainty of what this coming winter - the rainy season in the state - will do to ease the historic dry spell, officials said.

Last winter, a near-average amount of rain and snow fell in Northern California, prompting officials to relax conservation efforts statewide by turning over control to local water districts. That may have been a mistake, said Tracy Quinn, a Southern-California based water expert with the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Back to normal consumption

Ever since, Quinn said Wednesday, she notices more Californians have gone back to running water sprinklers full tilt, and hears friends and family expressing uncertainty whether the state is even in drought anymore. "It's very clear that at least in this drought voluntary conservation hasn't been successful," Quinn said. "What got us the savings we need is mandatory conservation throughout the state."

Overall, California cities and towns saved less than 18 percent on water in August, compared to the period before Gov. Jerry Brown declared a drought emergency. The amount saved was down 36 percent from August 2015, when urban Californians were under Brown's order to cut water use by 25 percent. — AP

REMAINS OF NEW YORK SOLDIER KILLED IN KOREAN WAR RETURN HOME

MASSENA, NEW YORK: The remains of a New York soldier killed during the Korean War have been returned for burial in his upstate hometown this weekend. The Pentagon says the remains of Sgt. 1st Class Louis Baxter of Massena (muh-SEE'-nah) were identified last month through DNA samples provided by his siblings and a nephew.

Military officials say the 22-year-old Baxter was serving in an artillery battalion in the Army's 7th Infantry Division when his unit was attacked during the fighting at the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea in late November 1950.

Baxter, initially listed as missing in action, was declared dead in 1953. His remains were recovered in September 2001. They were returned Wednesday to Massena, on the Canadian border in St. Lawrence County. Baxter will be given a military funeral Saturday. — AP

AFTER TESTY VP DEBATE, TRUMP REBUFFS CLAIM HE 'LOVES' PUTIN

RUNNING MATE ON THE DEFENSIVE

HENDERSON, NEVADA: Donald Trump pushed back Wednesday on Hillary Clinton's accusation that he's cozying up to Russian President Vladimir Putin after the charge put Trump's running mate on the defensive during the vice presidential debate.

Trump offered effusive praise for Mike Pence's performance - but also claimed credit for it - even as both campaigns acknowledged that the sole vice presidential debate was unlikely to alter the race's trajectory. The celebrity businessman said his relationship with Russia's leader would be determined by how Moscow responds to strong US leadership under a Trump administration. "They say Donald Trump loves Putin. I don't love, I don't hate. We'll see how it works," Trump told a rally outside Las Vegas.

Weird fascination

Clinton on Wednesday shrugged that off, saying Trump has "this weird fascination with dictators." "My opponent seems not to know the difference between an ally and adversary," Clinton said at an evening fund raiser in Washington. "There seems to be some misunderstanding about what it means to have a dictatorship and provide leadership."

The billionaire candidate sought to take away an argument that Clinton and her running mate, Tim Kaine, have ramped up in the final weeks of the campaign as they work to portray Trump as dangerous for American interests overseas. While US-Russia relations nosedive over failed diplomacy in Syria, Trump has complimented Putin, calling him a strong leader and even encouraging him to track down Clinton's missing e-mails, though Trump later said he was being sarcastic.

"You guys love Russia," Kaine said in Tuesday's debate. "You both have said Vladimir Putin is a better leader than the president." In a forceful rebuke, Pence described Putin as a "small and bullying leader," but blamed Clinton and President Barack Obama for a "weak and feckless" foreign policy that had awakened Moscow's aggression in Ukraine and meddling in the Middle East.

The US and Russia back opposing sides in Syria's civil war but both are fighting the Islamic State group there. The US cut off talks with Russia about Syria this week after the latest cease-fire collapsed, blaming Russia for failing to fulfill its commitments under the deal. "I can say this: If we get along and Russia went out with us and knocked the hell out of ISIS, that's OK with me folks," Trump said, using an acronym for the extremist group.

Since last week's debate, Trump has faced a barrage of questions over a leaked tax return showing he lost more than \$900 million in 1995. In turn, he's sought to reframe his life story as a comeback tale he hopes to recreate on behalf of a faltering nation. "America needs a turnaround. American needs a comeback. America needs a change. And that's why I'm running," Trump



HENDERSON, NEVADA: Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump speaks during a campaign rally on Wednesday. — AP

said. Taking the stage in Henderson, Nevada, Trump took his own victory lap for Pence's performance, which he called "phenomenal. Pence's cool demeanor contrasted with Trump's bluster during his own, top-of-the-ticket showdown against Clinton. However strong Pence's performance, Trump made clear he considers it a reflection of himself. "I'm getting a lot of credit, because that's really my first so-called choice, that was my first hire," Trump said of Pence.

'Did just fine'

Even Clinton's team wasn't claiming that Kaine had come out on top. Former President Bill Clinton, for example, his wife's running mate "did just fine."

Kaine acknowledged that even his wife gave him a hard time for his constant interruptions during the debate. But Kaine said he was effectively able to block Pence from attacking Clinton. "I've never played hockey but I think I'd be a good goalie, based on last night," he said. The big moment for their running

mates behind them, both Clinton and Trump were shifting focus back to each other - and to Sunday's debate, the second of three showdowns between the nominees.

Clinton was deep in debate prep Wednesday at her Washington home. She was huddling with campaign chairman John Podesta, top policy aid Jake Sullivan and her debate advisers.

Trump, meanwhile, was on the campaign trail, making several stops across Nevada. In Reno, the New Yorker appeared to lecture Nevadans on how their state is correctly pronounced and then did an exaggerated version of his preferred pronunciation of "Neh-VAH-da," though most residents of the Silver State pronounce it, "Neh-VAD-uh." He then declared that "nobody says it the other way." Campaign manager Kellyanne Conway said, despite Trump's travels, the candidate was preparing "constantly" for the debate. Trump planned his own town hall in New Hampshire on Thursday, in an apparent dress rehearsal for the big event. — AP

TRUMP DONATED TO STATE ATTORNEYS GENERAL REVIEWING HIS BUSINESS

NEW YORK: US Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has given campaign contributions to state attorneys general while they considered decisions affecting his business, the Wall Street Journal reported on Wednesday.

The Journal said records showed that Trump, his family and associates donated in particular to attorneys general in New York, from the 1980s through incumbent Eric Schneiderman, a Democrat who said last month he had opened an inquiry into the Donald J. Trump Foundation. "The money was given often when Mr. Trump's companies had decisions pending in these offices," it said.

Reuters could not confirm the report. The Trump campaign did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Trump, a New York real estate develop-

er, has said during his campaign for the Nov. 8 election that as a businessman, he has made contribution to a number of politicians. He says his rival, Democrat Hillary Clinton, is part of a corrupt system in which rich donors influence politics, and that he is an outsider who can fix it. "In total, Mr. Trump has given about \$140,000 to a dozen people who either were state attorneys general or running for the post from 2001 to 2014, according to donation records," the Journal said. "Some of the recipients returned the contributions." The Washington Post has reported that Trump donated foundation money to support Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi, a Republican, who was considering launching an investigation into Trump University, Trump's for-profit education venture. — Reuters