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# OPINION

## EDITORIALS

### Find a flooding solution

■ It's time to fix the severe flooding that's a chronic problem in many San Joaquin Valley communities.

**T**here are many lessons to be learned from this latest round of flooding in the San Joaquin Valley. But a major one is that our flood-control system in many parts of the region is terribly inadequate.

That lesson seems so obvious given the perspective of this week's devastating flooding in Earlimart. But for too long we have ignored the potential for disaster, especially after the rainy season ends.

However, the El Nino-related weather patterns this year have brought intense flood waters to many Valley communities like Earlimart, Mendota, Firebaugh and Huron, and the message finally seems to be sinking in. Now our legislators and Gov. Pete Wilson must work together to solve the problems for all citizens of the Valley, not just the most affluent. Poor people live in many of the Valley communities that are flooded and they don't get much attention from our politicians except during a disaster.

This is not a new story. Many of the communities that have flooded this year also have similar problems annually, even without El Nino. A natural question for residents is how long this must go on. But if the current flooding finally spurs action, that will be a positive outcome from this tragedy.

We must find long-range solutions to the

flooding and not settle for the temporary fixes that our politicians and bureaucrats have foisted on us in the past. Most solutions — dams, levees and other flood-control projects — are expensive. But the public likely would be willing to support them if they are well-designed and would give long-term relief.

Local legislators have been on the scene seeking state and federal disaster funds to help residents with immediate flooding problems. They also are working on legislation that may provide long-term relief. Earlimart residents would like to see the White River widened or the river channel deepened. They also would like to see a dam built to control the flow. It's clear that we need more information on the river before specific recommendations can be made. Many Earlimart residents feel they have been ignored by government because many of them are poor. Some have said that future flooding in the area could cause the loss of life if solutions are not found. Those concerns must not be disregarded.

State Sen. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, promised Earlimart residents that he will return to the community to discuss long-term solutions. Costa and the governor are working on flood-relief measures that could provide the funding to solve the problem. Their work could be merged in a final version.

But the important thing is to find a solution and not allow the competing measures to get hung up in partisan political bickering. The Valley's flooding problem, as well as the flooding problems in other areas of the state, must be solved as quickly as possible.