

Mr. Chairman and members of this committee:

Thank you for coming to Ely and thank you for this opportunity to address some possible legislative initiatives related to water in Nevada...and in Utah too!

I am Val Taylor, a 30-year resident of Baker, and Justice of the Peace there for the past twenty years. I'm here today representing the Great Basin Water Network and the Snake Valley Citizens Alliance. The statewide Great Basin Water Network was formed to bring rational voices to discussions of water allocation and use. The Snake Valley Citizens Alliance is comprised of both Nevadans and Utahns, and strongly opposes water exportation from White Pine County to Southern Nevada for ungoverned sprawl.

We think it is very urgent that you consider the impacts of these huge new water projects on the future of both rural and urban economies. Removal of water from these valleys threatens our industrial base of ranching and mining-- industries that have co-existed sustainably for many years, but which stand little chance of surviving if large amounts of water are piped away.

As in virtually all scenic areas of the West, tourism is fast becoming a major sector of White Pine County's economic engine. Great Basin National Park, towering between Spring and Snake Valleys, is listed as one of Nevada's treasures, and ranks second among all North American parks for its pristine environment. Our green, unspoiled mountain ranges overlook incomparably vast valleys, with a normal visibility of over 100 miles, thanks to as yet unsullied air. This is prized territory for astronomers, as well as for bikers, hiking, camping, hunting, fishing and rock related recreation. Our productive ranching landscapes are an integral part of the beauty, in addition to their helping to support a healthy wild animal population..

Naturally, as Southern Nevada's congestion becomes more intolerable, a housing boom is occurring in White Pine County, both around Ely and in

EXHIBIT K - WATER RESOURCES
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outlying areas. The future of the Great Basin is assured: this is now choice residential and recreational territory, with the requisite supporting business community growing right here, surrounded by wisely managed open spaces that continue to nourish a rich biodiversity. And our water budget is in balance, thanks to the hard-learned conservation practices of generations who have chosen a spare, desert livelihood.

With careful, appropriate development of its own resources, the Great Basin economy will continue to grow. This development can only be accomplished by individuals, enterprises, and governance that are rooted in this place. A "cooperative water project" that results in the decimation of our water is unacceptable and certainly not compatible with the health and welfare of the citizens of the subject region.

But let's focus on water and your Committee. We offer some statewide suggestions which may already have basis in existing State policy and law:

First, we think it is imperative to match sustainable growth to sustainable water supplies. We do not have excess water in the driest, fastest growing state in the nation. This is a desert! The groundwater and surface water are put to beneficial use through industry, municipalities, ranchers, wildlife and plants. To remove water may consign us to the dustbowls of the past and soon-to-be future. In the desert state of Arizona, developers must bring proof of a hundred-year water supply to the State prior to the granting of a subdivision map. A similar requirement should prevail in Nevada.

We should end the practice of "water for profit" that has crept into Nevada under the radar. Somehow, through a little fine-tuning, our good Nevada water law that once prohibited the hoarding of water for speculation, now encourages private companies to snap up water for resale to developers. Shame! Water is a basic of life and shouldn't be used for profit. One official of a private water firm has pointed out that "Nevada has always been an extractive state." What's wrong with this remark, coming from a company whose stated goal is to gain control of Nevada's water "market?" First of all, says our good water law, the water belongs to the people.

All communities in Nevada should be required to update their water conservation plans every 5 years and to demonstrate real water savings. We suggest incentives and disincentives that encourage compliance by communities. A deadline for compliance must be set.

Rewrite the State Water Plan following the next session of the Legislature. You moved this office under the State Engineer, now you need to demand that water planning is done. The plan should include the aforementioned conservation plan, population and supply forecasts, and impacts of such forecasts on the "availability" of water, if there is such a thing. The financial impact of water developments should be costed out for the public to review.

We strongly urge you to require water purveyors to develop equitable rate structuring that is fair and provides for basic uses, but also provides strong incentives for conservation. In many southwestern cities there is ample precedence for sharply tiered water rates, together with hard evidence of the resulting conservation. In fact, professionals have concluded that tiered rates are the only conservation plan that works, and that consumers come to appreciate the system.

We will be suggesting some procedural and policy changes and some definition refinements within the State Engineer's office based on our personal experiences with that office. We are working on those recommendations and will submit them to you in writing, probably by the Elko meeting next month.

We think water is important to keep in place. We value our natural resources enormously. That's why we chose to live here. We think it's wrong to devalue our quality of life for profit in urban areas. That is not equality and justice. Not everything can be measured in dollars.

We thank you for listening and considering our preliminary proposals for water planning, conservation, rate structures and attention to sustainable water supplies.

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We think water is important to keep in place. We value our natural resources enormously, and we think it's wrong to devalue the rural practice of stewardship and sustainable livelihood, in favor of profit in urban areas. That is not equality and justice, and not everything of worth can be measured in dollars.

We thank you for listening and for considering our preliminary proposals for water planning, conservation, rate structures, and attention to sustainable water supplies.

Presented by Val Taylor, for GREAT BASIN WATER NETWORK and

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