

**Statement of Michael Connor  
Nominee for the Position of  
Deputy Secretary of the  
United States Department of the Interior  
Before the  
U.S. Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources**

**September 17, 2013**

Chairman Wyden, Ranking Member Murkowski, and members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the Deputy Secretary of the Interior. Unfortunately, given work and school commitments, my family could not join me today. Nonetheless, having served in the Obama Administration for over four years now, I want to acknowledge the reality that most of the sacrifices of public service are made by our families and I remain grateful for the continuing support of my wife Shari and our children Matthew and Gabriela.

Of course, I greatly appreciate that Senator Bingaman was gracious enough to return to the Capital to make a statement on my behalf. I can't do justice in explaining how much it means to me to have his ongoing support – other than to say that I wouldn't be here without it and that he remains the model for how I conduct myself during my time in public service. As a New Mexican, I am also proud and appreciative that Senator Domenici has offered a statement on my behalf. He also would have been here today were it not for a conflict with this annual public policy conference at NMSU.

My service as the Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation at the Department of the Interior has been a tremendously rewarding experience. Through the commitment of Reclamation's employees, support from the Administration and Congress, and the strong relationship we have built with an array of stakeholders, we have accomplished a great deal during the last four and a half years. We have completed historic binational agreements with Mexico on the Colorado River; negotiated and begun implementation on five new Indian water rights settlements; and stood up a WaterSMART program that has increased water supply across the West by over 700,000 acre-feet per year on average. We completed several aquatic restoration projects that improve environmental conditions in a number of western rivers. In support of the President's commitment to renewable energy, we installed over 100 megawatts of new hydropower generating capacity on Reclamation facilities while also identifying opportunities for developing several hundred more.

I am proud of this record, not just for the needs that are being addressed but also because of the cooperation and collaboration necessary to achieve these results. I have directed the efforts of a team of over 5,000 federal employees who epitomize the definition of public service, demonstrating on a daily basis an ongoing commitment to develop and implement creative solutions to challenging water resource issues that further the interests of Reclamation's partners and the public. I have also worked closely and

developed water management strategies with a diverse group of stakeholders, including those in state and local government, Indian tribes, agricultural and municipal water users, power users, and environmental interests.

I am now afforded an incredible opportunity to serve the Department in a new capacity, as Deputy Secretary. I am honored and appreciative that President Obama and Secretary Jewell have seen fit to nominate me for this important position. Of course, this opportunity would not exist but for the confidence placed in me by Secretary Salazar who in 2009 recommended me for my present position. His support and leadership have been invaluable in preparing me for this new and significant challenge.

The Deputy Secretary position was most recently held by my friend and colleague David J. Hayes and his shoes are very large ones to fill. Nonetheless, I am excited at the prospect and believe that my background provides me the experience needed to effectively carry out the important responsibilities of Deputy Secretary—the second highest ranking official in the Department and its Chief Operating Officer.

As I noted to this Committee during my 2009 confirmation hearing, I grew up in New Mexico, a state rich in natural resources (with the exception of water) and which has a land base that is slightly over one-third in federal ownership. It is a state where approximately ten percent of the population is Native-American and I am proud that my maternal grandfather was a leader within the Taos Pueblo. My childhood home, where my parents still live, is located across the street from a major irrigation canal that serves agricultural land within the Elephant Butte Irrigation District. It has been said that if you don't know where you are, you don't know who you are. I would like to think that knowing and understanding where I am from has helped me better understand the responsibilities of the Department of the Interior and the people we serve.

I am also confident that my background as an engineer and lawyer has helped prepare me well for this position. As an engineer, I worked in the private sector for GE in its Power Generation Services business before going back to school to obtain my law degree. Upon graduation, I began my federal career at Interior in the Solicitor's Honors Program which afforded me an opportunity to serve as counsel for all of Interior's bureaus. I also ran the Secretary's Indian water rights office before moving to the United States Senate as Counsel to this Committee. As I said in 2009, my eight years on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee staff were incredibly rewarding, productive, and educational, the highlight of my professional career at the time.

Without a doubt, however, the best experience for the job I hope to assume is the job I presently have. Water is a thread that runs through all our public and private lands and its availability in clean and reliable quantities is critical to the use, management, and enjoyment of other natural resources. Water sustains both the lives of our citizens and the economic activity that is the foundation for our communities. This relationship requires that the Bureau of Reclamation work across agency lines at Interior and closely with the states in carrying out its mission and serving the interests of the American people. Moreover, our facilities provide water and power for a large percentage of the

population but they have also impacted public resources and property interests that are managed or fall within the responsibility of other Interior bureaus. As a result, in running the Bureau of Reclamation, I have also gained significant insight and understanding into the missions of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Geological Survey, and even the Office of Surface Mining.

Obviously, effectively managing a Department with the breadth of Interior's responsibilities requires an even deeper understanding of the programs and activities of its individual bureaus. I am absolutely committed to that task – particularly given the fact that Interior's mission affects the lives of all Americans. Our public lands make significant economic contributions to this country through recreation activities, the production of renewable and fossil fuel based energy resources, hard rock mineral production, forage and grazing activities, timber production, and the delivery of water for agricultural, municipal, and industrial purposes. In fiscal year 2012, these activities contributed \$371 billion to the economy and supported 2.3 million jobs.

Interior is also entrusted with sacred trust responsibilities to Indian tribes and Alaska Natives, the preservation of our history and most special places, the empowerment of insular communities, and the protection and conservation of our wildlife resources. The changes taking place not only in this country but worldwide, including climate change, population growth, shifts in the global economy, and new technological developments, present challenges and opportunities to all sectors of Interior's responsibilities. I look forward to working closely with Secretary Jewell, our leadership team, and Interior's dedicated career employees to continue a collaborative process, informed by the best science, to refine existing strategies and develop new initiatives to address ongoing changes and ensure continued success in carrying out Interior's critical missions.

At the end of the day, I am convinced that the vast majority of the American public simply wants their leaders in Washington D.C. to work together and collaborate on solutions to the problems and challenges this country faces. I am absolutely committed to this goal and, if confirmed, will commit to this task with a sense of humility and a keen understanding of the need to work with the public, affected stakeholders, and Congress to most effectively carry out the Department's mission.

With just over three years left in this Administration, I am well aware that progress on seemingly intractable issues will best come through cooperative efforts grounded in a fundamental recognition of the legitimate interests of affected stakeholders and an unwavering commitment to achieving certainty and clarity on resource management issues. The Secretary has charted the right course with her substantive engagement on the issues of the day and her clear commitment to ensure the Department will be guided by transparency and integrity in carrying out its mission. I am equally committed to these principles and believe we can make great progress in working on much needed solutions by adhering to this approach.

Thank you for the opportunity to address my nomination. I look forward to continuing to work with you and will be happy to respond to questions at the appropriate time.