

Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Wyden
Nomination hearing for Michael Connor, Elizabeth Robinson and
Ronald Binz
September 17, 2013

- Today's business is to consider the views of three very well-qualified nominees.
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- Mike Connor, the President's choice to be the Deputy Secretary of the Interior, is well known to many of us.
- Mike ably staffed the Committee on water issues for 8 years, from 2001 to 2009.
- Before joining our staff, Mike got his start in the Solicitor's Honors Program at the Department of the Interior.
- After 5 years in the Solicitor's Office, he was appointed director of the Secretary of the Interior's Indian Water Rights Office, where he served for 3 more years, until Senator Bingaman hired him away to serve our Committee.
- For the past 4 years, since leaving the Committee, Mike has been the Commissioner of Reclamation, a position to which he was confirmed by the Senate in 2009.
- The Bureau of Reclamation is the largest wholesaler of water in the country, bringing water to more than 31 million people in 17 western states, and it is the second largest producer of hydroelectric power, operating 58 hydroelectric power plants, and generating more than 40 billion kilowatt-hours of power per year.
- Leading the Bureau is an enormous responsibility, and one which Mike has discharged with great distinction and to great acclaim.
- Both on the staff of the Committee and as Commissioner of Reclamation, Mike has demonstrated his integrity, his knowledge, his commitment to public service, and his ability to bring people together and to solve problems.
- Our next nominee is Beth Robinson, the President's choice to be the Under Secretary of Energy. She too is very well qualified.

- She currently serves as the Chief Financial Officer of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, to which she was confirmed by the Senate in 2009.
- As the Chief Financial Officer at NASA, Dr. Robinson has managed the budget of major federal agency which, like the Department of Energy is on the forefront of scientific research and technological development.
- Before joining NASA, she was the Assistant Director for Budget at the Office of Management and Budget, where she was the most senior career official.
- Before that, she was the Deputy Director of the Congressional Budget Office from 2003 to 2005.
- Still earlier in her career, she was a project director at Congress's Office of Technology Assessment, where she was a project examiner and branch chief.
- This background should serve Dr. Robinson well. This summer, Secretary Moniz reorganized the Department of Energy to consolidate its support offices with its environmental cleanup and legacy management functions under the Under Secretary, who is responsible for project management and performance across the Department.
- The Under Secretary for Management and Performance is being given an enormously important and challenging portfolio, and Dr. Robinson will bring a quarter-century of experience with federal budget and science-and-technology issues to the job.
- Ron Binz, who the President has chosen to fill Jon Wellinghoff's seat on the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, is no stranger to public utility issues.
- From 2007 to 2011, Mr. Binz chaired Colorado's Public Utility Commission, where he led the effort to implement Colorado's "New Energy Economy."
- He has also been a member of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, the Secretary of Energy's State Energy Advisory Board, the Electric Power Research Institute's Advisory Council, and the Harvard Electricity Policy Group.
- Before chairing the Public Utility Commission in Colorado, he was the Consumer Counsel for over a decade, served as the president of a non-profit organization

that promoted competition in telecommunications and energy markets, and ran his own public policy consulting firm.

- Since leaving the Public Utility Commission, he has returned to his public policy consulting practice,
- Like our other two nominees, Mr. Binz brings enormous experience, gained over the course of a professional lifetime, to the position for which he has been nominated.
- In considering the Binz nomination, I'll briefly describe the authorities of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.
- FERC's primary tasks have been overseeing the orderly development of the nation's water power resources and protecting electric ratepayers and natural gas consumers from unjust and unreasonable electric and gas prices.
- More recently, it has been handed the task of protecting electric and gas markets from manipulation and ensuring the reliability of the electric grid.
- FERC has no authority to regulate coal. That means no authority over fracking, leasing federal coal fields, the issuance of coal mining permits, or mine safety.
- That means it has no authority to regulate or license coal burning electric generating plants, or authorities to tell utilities which fuels to use to generate electricity.
- Most importantly, it has no authority to impose unjust or unreasonable rates or impose discriminatory or preferential charges on coal or coal-generated electricity—that means no backdoor taxes on coal or coal-generated electricity.
- Having just gotten back from the natural gas fields in the Bakken with Senator Hoeven, I do want to note that FERC actually does have the authority to permit interstate natural gas pipelines and to ensure competitive gas rates.
- I'm especially interested in Mr. Binz's views of this authority because natural gas, with 50 percent less carbon than other fossil fuels, is giving our consumers and businesses a pricing advantage in a tough global economy. As I saw in North Dakota, the key to keeping that gas affordable and accessible, is getting it to market and that brings us to pipelines.

- Pipelines are key to the infrastructure that gets the gas to market, and my hope for future, new pipelines, is America gets a win-win solution, not just more pipelines, but better, new pipelines, that save consumers and businesses money as they save energy, and offer an added boost by emitting less methane.
- I intend this morning to ask Mr. Binz for his ideas about potential win-win solutions with gas.
- I believe all three of these nominees are highly qualified for the positions they have been nominated for.
- I look forward to learning more about their thoughts on key issues this morning. I have a number of questions for each of them about some of the important issues facing their agencies.
- This Committee has a long bipartisan tradition of treating nominees who are asked questions and all Senators who ask them fairly. That tradition will be maintained today.
- I know that a number of my colleagues also have questions about issues important to them that they want to ask these nominees, and I want to make sure that today's hearing provides everyone with the opportunity to ask their important questions.
- I also want to be sure that each nominee gets the opportunity to respond to those questions,
- And I hope that at the end of the day, we can conclude this hearing with everyone having been treated fairly.