

TESTIMONY

**Gayla Brumfield
Chairwoman, Eastern New Mexico Water Utility Authority**

**Presented to the United States Senate
Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Chairman Jeff Bingaman**

Legislative Hearing on Senate Bill 3385

July 31, 2012

TESTIMONY OF GAYLA BRUMFIELD
EASTERN NEW MEXICO WATER UTILITY AUTHORITY

Chairman Bingaman, Ranking Member Murkowski and Members of the Committee, my name is Gayla Brumfield. I am a former Mayor of the City of Clovis, New Mexico and I currently serve as the Chairwoman of the Eastern New Mexico Water Utility Authority (Authority). I am here to present testimony in strong support of S. 3385, the Authorized Rural Water Projects Completion Act, which would resolve some of the most critical potable water supply issues in the Western United States and those specifically impacting the seven Eastern New Mexico Water Utility member agencies.

Mr. Chairman, we applaud and deeply appreciate your recognition of the importance of rural water projects and the need for the federal government to provide an adequate level of funding dedicated each year to complete these projects in a timely manner. The federal government's participation and funding capabilities are

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EASTERN NEW MEXICO WATER UTILITY AUTHORITY

essential to making the Eastern New Mexico Rural Water System a reality for our area residents. We are caught in a race against the failing Ogallala aquifer and the time it will take for the federal government to meet its commitment to complete this important project.

If federal funding continues along current trends and S. 3385 fails to become law then Eastern New Mexico's potable water supply will continue to decline at a rate that is outpacing our only viable alternative to meet our communities' needs. We believe this legislation will help us avoid costly delays in completing construction phases, limit long-term tax payer obligations, and assure a more predictable and cost efficient means of building the Eastern New Mexico Rural Water System to realize a sustainable supply of water.

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EASTERN NEW MEXICO WATER UTILITY AUTHORITY

This legislation is vital for Eastern New Mexico to establish a sustainable supply of water and assure our socio-economic future.

A sustainable supply of water is critical to the future of our region which supports, among other things, the 27th Special Operations Wing at Cannon Air Force Base, a number of industries including dairy, large-scale food production and processing, and colleges and universities.

Providing a sustainable water supply for Eastern New Mexico is our most significant challenge. Our communities rely solely on water reserves located in the Ogallala aquifer. Our member communities are investing millions of dollars each year in buying water rights, wells and transmission lines just to keep up with a demand that is essentially flat. Even with continuous investment in production facilities pumping capacity is declining in double digit percentages every year.

TESTIMONY OF GAYLA BRUMFIELD
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The rate of decline of the aquifer is variable and it is hard to predict exactly how many more years we have. But, we absolutely know that if we do not begin receiving substantial increases in federal funding over the next several years, the outlook for our communities is dire.

Significant progress has been made since the Eastern New Mexico Rural Water System received Congressional Authorization in 2009. However, the majority of funding, more than \$25 million to date, has come from the state of New Mexico and our member communities. Last year the project broke ground on Phase I, building the intake structure at Ute Reservoir. We are currently seeking federal funding for our next phase of construction, the building of an interim groundwater pipeline, which could provide relief for a few additional years while the rest of project is built.

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EASTERN NEW MEXICO WATER UTILITY AUTHORITY

We are at a critical point in the development of the project and appear before you today to urge Congress to expeditiously pass S. 3385. We cannot emphasize strongly enough just how important this project is for our member entities, for our military, and for the citizens and businesses of Eastern New Mexico.

While our situation is dire, we are well aware that six other critical regional rural water systems are languishing and this effort will assure a future for the west.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for championing this effort and please know that the Eastern New Mexico Water Utility Authority stands in strong support of S. 3385 and will gladly assist you in moving this important legislation through Congress.

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