

NOMINATIONS BUSINESS MEETING FOLLOWED BY
FULL COMMITTEE HEARING ON EXTREME DROUGHT

Tuesday, June 14, 2022

Chairman Manchin's Opening Statement

- The committee will come to order.
- Before we get to our drought solutions hearing, we will first consider three pending nominations.
- The three nominees are:
 - Dr. David Applegate to be the Director of the Geological Survey;
 - Ambassador Carmen Cantor to be the Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Insular and International Affairs; and
 - Dr. Evelyn Wang to be the Director of the Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy.
- We held a hearing on all three nominations on April 28.
- I support all three nominees.
- They are all well qualified for the positions to which they have been nominated.
 - Dr. Applegate has been a career geologist with the USGS for the past 18 years and has served as the Acting Director for the past year.
 - Ambassador Cantor is a career member of the Senior Executive Service, and an experienced diplomat with the State Department.

- She has spent the last 2 and a half years as our Ambassador to the Federated States of Micronesia, a post to which the Senate confirmed her by voice vote.
- Dr. Wang is the head of the Mechanical Engineering Department at MIT and has served as the Associate Director of DOE's Solid State Solar Thermal Energy Conversion Center.
- I think all three nominees will bring their extensive knowledge and experience to their positions.
- I urge my colleagues to vote to confirm them.
- We will vote on these nominations once we have a quorum.
- Moving on to the focus of today's hearing.
- Thank you all for being here today as we discuss the western drought crisis, an extremely pressing issue, that is no doubt ever present in the minds of our Western colleagues.
- The West is currently facing a historic mega-drought and 92% of the area at large is facing some degree of drought.
- For some states, like Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico and Utah – that figure is at 100 percent.
- In the southwestern U.S., scientists have called this the worst the area has seen in *1,200 years*.
- I know the water issues out West are very different than what we have in West Virginia – we are often faced with the opposite problem of flooding, rather than drought.
- But it doesn't matter where you live; drought has a domino effect that indirectly spills over into the lives of all Americans – from the economic losses to wildfires, to food scarcities and higher food prices.

- The historic significance of this period should serve as a wake-up call to the entire country on the critical importance of stakeholders coming together to develop and implement drought-proof water solutions that tackle both water supply and water demand – especially in light of population growth and climate change.
- But as I have often said on the topic of climate change, I want to stay focused on actionable solutions. And that will be the focus of this drought discussion today.
- The Bureau of Reclamation has a vital role to play when it comes to managing western water resources and addressing water scarcity.
- President Teddy Roosevelt created the Bureau of Reclamation shortly after signing the Reclamation Act on June 17, 1902 – 120 years ago this Friday.
- Today, the Bureau of Reclamation is the nation's largest water supplier, operating over 300 reservoirs that provide 1 in 5 Western farmers with water for their crops, and deliver 10 trillion gallons of drinking water to millions of people each year.
- But the agency is currently facing unprecedented challenges given the historic low and continually declining levels of water in many of the country's largest reservoirs.
- In the Colorado River Basin, Lake Mead and Lake Powell have reached their lowest levels ever recorded. Currently, Lake Mead is sitting at 29% capacity, while Lake Powell is currently at 27% capacity.

- These lake levels put hydropower, which is critical to current and future grid reliability in the West, at risk, because the water must be high enough to turn the turbines.
- In fact, the North American Electric Reliability Corporation, or NERC, cited the threat of low water levels to hydroelectricity generation to be among the challenges to maintaining grid reliability in the West for the coming summer.
- Future water projections in this basin also look grim, and if water levels continue to decline, it would trigger the most severe water cuts for the Southwest.
- This is incredibly alarming.
- These reservoirs are a crucial source of water to millions of households, thousands of farmers and ranchers, wildlife habitat, and provide power for over 3.5 million homes.
- With multiple entities competing for limited water resources that Reclamation facilities provide, there are no doubt going to be some tough decisions ahead about how to equitably allocate these water supplies.
- Last year, Congress invested in western water infrastructure and provided the Bureau of Reclamation a historic amount of funding in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law – \$8.3 billion – to fund projects that can provide short-term drought relief and long-term drought resilience.
- It provided funding for water recycling, desalination, storage and aging infrastructure projects, incentives for water conservation and efficiency, and funding for projects that provide multiple benefits for people and the environment.

- I look forward to hearing from Commissioner Touton about how the agency is prioritizing these funds to deal with our scarce water supplies and where additional congressional action may be needed to prepare for the future.
- While the discussion around drought has centered on water supply availability, water demand solutions must also be part of the conversation.
- I've talked at length about how energy efficiency is a common-sense way to reduce our energy consumption – and I think it makes sense to look at water through the same lens.
- Water and energy are two sides of the same coin – it takes a lot of energy to treat the water we use in our every day lives, and it takes substantial amounts of water to produce energy.
- Given the current drought and high energy costs we're seeing across the board, water conservation and efficient water use are the lowest hanging fruit to managing our demand.
- I understand there are tools available that can help Western communities make investments to conserve water.
- One such tool is the Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART program. This program was designed specifically to address water demand by investing in irrigation infrastructure and water conservation and efficiency improvements to help communities respond to water scarcity conflicts across the arid West.
- One thing we can all agree on is that an all-of-the-above, collective approach is needed to adapt to these tough conditions, because there are only so many ways to split such a critical and limited resource.

- I look forward to learning from our expert witnesses on where opportunities exist to further invest in both water supply and water demand.
- Finally, a long-term, coordinated drought effort is going to require flexible water management strategies and meaningful investment at the state and Federal level.
- The bottom line is this: water is the most essential resource to the health of our people, our economy, and our environment.
- But prolonged drought is becoming a frightening new norm. It's going to take effort and collaboration from all parties involved to commit to implementing sustainable drought solutions.
- Recognizing this reality is critical. So I look forward to learning more and discussing how we can better manage and conserve the limited water resources that are the lifeblood of so many economies and communities.
- I'll now turn to Senator Barrasso for his opening remarks.