

Statement of Brenda Wren Burman
Nominee for the Position of Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation,
Department of the Interior
Before the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources United States Senate
July 20, 2017

Thank you Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Committee. I am humbled and honored to appear here today as President Trump's nominee for the position of Commissioner for the Bureau of Reclamation.

Thank you also to Senator Flake for your kind introduction, and for your leadership and service to the Grand Canyon State and the United States.

Before I begin my remarks, I would like to recognize the members of my family who have joined me today. My parents Tim and Pat Burman are out of the country but are watching online.

Here in the room I have the Minnesota Burmans, with my brother Mark, my sister-in-law Linnea, my nephew Collin, and my niece Annika who were kind enough on short notice to fly out to support me.

I deeply appreciate the trust Secretary Zinke has placed in me by asking me to serve as the Commissioner of Reclamation. I ask for your consent to the President's nomination.

While I was born a westerner in California, my parents moved to Minnesota and then to New Jersey, all good places to grow up, with lakes, rivers and woods, camping, hiking, canoeing and in New Jersey – the shore. Through this upbringing, I witnessed firsthand the importance of water in all forms, from East to West, from lakes to oceans.

I started moving myself back westward by choosing Kenyon College in beautiful rural Gambier, Ohio, next to the Kokosing River. But I fell in love with the southwest after working as a volunteer trail crew member at Carlsbad Caverns National Park in New Mexico and visiting my best friend in Arizona during winter break. At Carlsbad I worked in the backcountry for the summer and one of the things I distinctly remember is that it was a wet year – lots of rain – and yet we did not find waterholes or running washes. The only water we found was in the caves. This was a truly dry and unique place. A few years later, I worked as a Park Ranger at Grand Canyon National Park. It was a beautiful high desert with Ponderosa pine forest on the rim, which became progressively dryer and hotter as you hiked down into the Canyon and towards the Colorado River. In the Canyon, we counted on scarce springs in the backcountry for our water supply, and on the rim we counted on a rickety old pipeline that often broke to bring water from Roaring Springs up to the rim and the tourist area. It was a learning experience that taught me the value of water and the hard work it often takes to get it.

From those first days working in the southwest, I have been fortunate in my career to work on many complex water and power issues across the west. In Arizona, my first meeting as a young lawyer in 1998 was a negotiating session for a Navajo and Hopi water settlement. I remember the tribal representatives, the Department of the Interior and Bureau officials, and all of the local stakeholders—ranchers, water districts, local towns, utilities. Hours and hours were spent by all of us trying to reach an agreement. In that case, it did not come together, but it taught me a valuable lesson: as long as people keep working together, there is always hope.

I soon represented a negotiating party with the Zuni Indian Tribe in settling their water rights in Arizona for their Zuni Heaven Reservation. After four years of work, and on my last day in private practice, the parties signed the settlement agreement.

I left private practice to move to D.C. to work for Senator Jon Kyl as his water and energy attorney. One of my first tasks was to support Senator Kyl in passing the Zuni Indian Tribe Water Rights Settlement. Knowing the Tribe and the parties well, I was thrilled to see that settlement through the Congressional authorization process. The Tribe, the Department of the Interior, and the parties back at home then did the hard work to bring together everything needed to make that settlement effective.

The Zuni settlement was relatively small, which served as great preparation for staffing the largest Indian water settlement in our country's history with the Gila River Indian Community, a Tribe with significant land in the heart of the Phoenix metropolitan area, downstream from important ranching, farming, and mining operations and nestled between the many cities in Arizona's largest metropolitan area. The Community's water rights claims created a large uncertainty for other water users—natural resource uncertainty, economic and financial uncertainty—and it is a credit to the Tribe and to the parties that they were able to settle. Senator Kyl gave significant personal time to bring the parties together and I supported him as he fought for Congressional passage of the Settlement. When it finally passed, it was one of the proudest moments of my career.

What I learned from supporting Senator Kyl and working with all the parties to the Gila Settlement, as well as the Central Arizona Project settlement with the United States and the Tohono O'odham Nation Indian water rights settlement, was how important it is to understand each party's needs and wants, strengths and weaknesses, and their political pressures back home. Water rights settlements take years of negotiations, years to secure Congressional passage, and then years to implement. You have to learn when to push, when to get out of the way, and at times, where to draw the line. Cooperation and principled leadership are key.

These experiences were a tremendous building block for working at the Department of the Interior. In 2005, I joined the Department as a member of President George W. Bush's Administration and was soon appointed to be Deputy Commissioner for External and Intergovernmental Affairs, the number two position at the Bureau of Reclamation. Later, I was appointed Deputy Assistant Secretary of Water and Science. While serving Senator Kyl, I had

worked closely with Arizona, New Mexico, and California interests on Colorado River issues and other matters. With the Department and Reclamation, I was given the opportunity to work on issues directly impacting the Colorado River, as it affected all seven basin states and the country of Mexico. This service took place in the form of negotiation and analysis of the 2007 Shortage Guidelines and as the Secretary's designee for the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program.

I worked on other difficult water issues across the west as well, including the Klamath Basin, the Central Valley Project, and the Rio Grande.

Right before I came to Reclamation, the Bureau faced criticisms from our contractors, customers, and stakeholders about its costs and lack of efficiency. Reclamation embarked on both an internal and external review of how we operated to directly address this criticism with quarterly public meetings, methodic analysis, and increased accountability. I joined the Bureau as this process was beginning. My job was to ensure our "external" partners across the west and on the Hill were heard and their problems were addressed. In the end, I believe we improved management decision-making and made Reclamation more accountable.

It was a privilege to serve the west and our country at the Department of the Interior and an honor to work with the many fine, dedicated people at the Department and at Reclamation. After I left Interior, I worked for The Nature Conservancy in Arizona as their Senior Water Policy Advisor, working on Colorado and local river issues, as well as forestry issues. From there I was hired by Metropolitan Water District of Southern California to work in their Sacramento office on, among other things, California drought, Bay-Delta matters, and Colorado River issues.

I currently work for the Salt River Project Agricultural Improvement and Power District, which operates one of the oldest Reclamation projects in the country, providing water and power to the Phoenix metropolitan area. As the Director of Water Strategy, my team and I are an integral part of Salt River Project's work with the State, with Tribes, and with other water providers to pursue new solutions for moving water where it is needed to address drought, potential shortages on the Colorado River, and eventual growth.

Collectively, I believe these experiences have prepared me to serve Secretary Zinke and the American people in facing today's top water challenges. If confirmed, I promise to perform my duties with integrity. I promise to provide the best-informed advice possible to Secretary Zinke, to listen to and work with this Committee and Congress, to listen to and work with western water interests, and to listen to and work with Reclamation's impressive employees who use their expertise every day to deliver water and generate power across the west.

Chairman Murkowski, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee today. I look forward to your questions.