

**Statement of Estevan López
Nominee for the Position of
Commissioner of the
United States Bureau of Reclamation
Before the
U.S. Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources**

May 13, 2014

Chair Landrieu, Ranking Member Murkowski, and members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today. Thank you also for the opportunity to meet with many of you in person over the last few days. Unfortunately, given work and school commitments, my family could not join me today. Nonetheless, in their absence, I want to acknowledge the importance of my family in whatever professional success I have had to date. I remain grateful for the love and continuing support of my wife Suzanne and our children Victoria and Juan.

I greatly appreciate that New Mexico Senators Heinrich and Udall were gracious enough to offer to introduce me to this Committee. I also sincerely appreciate the letters of support submitted on my behalf by retired New Mexico Senators Bingaman and Dominici, both of whom previously served on this Committee.

I am honored to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation. I am a professional engineer who has served as Director of the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission under both Republican and Democratic Governors in the State of New Mexico. With over two decades of water resources management experience, I have worked directly on many issues that affect water management throughout the entire western United States, including interstate stream compacts, endangered species, drought, Indian water rights, rural water projects, water conservation and river management for multiple resource goals.

By way of telling you a little about myself, I am a native New Mexican and have lived most of my life in New Mexico. I grew up working on my father's small ranch, irrigating pastures from centuries-old acequias, community irrigation systems, that are fed by the Rio Santa Barbara, a small tributary of the Rio Grande originating in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, thus beginning a lifetime of work in water management. I attended New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology in Socorro, New Mexico and was conferred Bachelor of Science degrees in Petroleum Engineering and Chemistry in 1979. Upon graduation, I went to work in oil production in Prudhoe Bay, Alaska working for Arco Alaska, Inc. I loved Alaska and the work was challenging and exhilarating, but I wanted to move back to New Mexico, back to family and to the state that I wanted to make a difference in.

After a few years doing construction work and traveling abroad, I went to work as a Utility Engineer for the New Mexico Public Utility Commission. Here, I once again began working on water management as I reviewed the sufficiency of the water rights portfolios and the adequacy of water management policies of the privately owned water utilities that the state regulated. After a few years, I had an opportunity to help the County of Santa Fe start up a new water utility in the fast growing area around the city of Santa Fe. Before long, the County created a County Utility Department that I led, then that Department was merged with the County's Land Use Department and I got to lead the County's Land Use and Utilities Department, managing firsthand the interconnectedness of water availability and development potential. By this time, I was completely engaged in the complexities of managing New Mexico's scarce water resources. When Governor Richardson was elected, I was asked to be Director of the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission and Deputy State Engineer in 2003. When Governor Martinez was elected, she reappointed me as Director of the Interstate Stream Commission in 2011. My time at the Interstate Stream Commission has been a fascinating mix of technical, legal, policy, financial and political challenges. It has been a perfect training ground for someone asked to serve as Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation.

I believe that my tenure as Director for the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission has allowed me to learn about and deal with many of the issues that the Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation is faced with, albeit at a regional scale. The New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission, created by the New Mexico legislature in 1935, has broad powers to investigate, protect, conserve and develop New Mexico's waters including both interstate and intrastate stream systems. The Commission is responsible for ensuring compliance with New Mexico's eight interstate stream compacts, and is also responsible for regional and state water planning in New Mexico.

My service as Director of the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission for the last 11 years has been a tremendously rewarding experience. I have had the privilege to represent New Mexico as Governor Martinez's Representative to the Colorado River; New Mexico's Commissioner to the Upper Colorado River Compact and Canadian River Compact Commissions; and New Mexico's Engineer Adviser to the Rio Grande Compact Commission. I have also represented New Mexico on water issues in both the US/Mexico Border Governors Conference and the New Mexico/Chihuahua Commission.

Given the Interstate Stream Commission's broad statutory responsibilities, I have been involved in finding river management solutions to difficult endangered species issues on the Rio Grande, as well as the San Juan, Pecos and Canadian Rivers. I have served as New Mexico's representative on the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Work Group, a federal advisory committee to the Department of Interior on managing multiple resource objectives in the reach of the Colorado River between Glen Canyon Dam and Lake Mead. These efforts for balancing the preservation of endangered species with

other resource goals, including the protection of water users in the arid southwest, has required innovation, collaboration and perseverance.

Working with my colleagues at the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission and Office of the State Engineer, I have worked to promote and implement settlement of Indian water rights claims of six of the state's Indian Nations and Pueblos. I also helped draft and testified in favor of New Mexico legislation to create a New Mexico Indian Water Rights Settlement Fund to set aside state cost share funds needed for implementation of those settlements. To date, New Mexico has provided about \$65 million toward a \$130 million cost share obligation. Successful resolution of Native American water rights claims is critical to the water security of all New Mexicans, not just for our Native American communities.

The Interstate Stream Commission has also been a strong advocate for assuring a long-term water supply for New Mexicans in the eastern part of the state where ground water supplies in the Ogallala aquifer are rapidly dwindling. In that vein, I have supported development of the Eastern New Mexico Rural Water Supply Project to deliver renewable water from Ute Reservoir on the Canadian River to communities like Clovis and Portales New Mexico. Without this water supply project, these communities could begin running out of water within 10 years. The Interstate Stream Commission has been at the forefront of water planning efforts in New Mexico through its management of the state and regional water planning programs in the state. During my tenure as Director, New Mexico completed the last of 16 regional water plans as well as its first formal state water plan and all of these water plans are currently being updated.

I am proud of the work that we have done during my time as Director the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission. All told, we have helped assure water security for our people, while improving the operation of our river systems for the benefit of the endangered species and other resources and the natural ecology generally. Particularly in the last several years of record setting drought, we have found innovative ways to conserve and stretch the utility of this scarce but vital resource. All of these efforts have required establishment of strong relationships with diverse stakeholders, including our neighboring states, local governments, Indian tribes, agricultural and municipal water users, power users, and environmental interests.

Interestingly, one of our key partners in almost all of the efforts I have described is the Bureau of Reclamation and now, if confirmed, I would have the opportunity to serve as the Commissioner for the Bureau of Reclamation. I am deeply honored and appreciative that President Obama and Secretary Jewell have seen fit to nominate me for this important position.

As you know, Michael Connor who used to staff this Committee and was recently confirmed as Deputy Secretary of the Department of Interior most recently held the position of Commissioner of Reclamation. I know Mr. Connor well and realize that he leaves large shoes to fill. I am excited by the challenge this presents and believe that

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my professional experience has prepared me for the challenge. I am also comforted knowing that Mr. Connor will still be at Interior to advise and guide me; and knowing the capabilities of many of the people in leadership positions at Reclamation and the Department of Interior. I realize that I will be joining a strong and capable team.

If confirmed, I am committed to working with the public, affected stakeholders and Congress to collaborate to find balanced solutions to the water resource and hydropower generation challenges facing the western United States.

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.