



# washington dc update

## Commissioner Connor Testimony – “No New Starts”

August 4, 2009

Note:

Fred Hicks will participate on behalf of WESTCAS at a meeting this Friday with the Commissioner and Anne Castle. Update to follow.

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Just for fun: I came across this statement by a very prominent and gifted DC attorney—he seems to be mixing a few metaphors. How many do you detect?

*“The bludgeoning the climate bill took on the House side, to get the squeaky vote that it got, that was the first cut in the fighter that put a little blood in the water.”*

There was much comment recently when Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Mike Connor testified before Chair Grace Napolitano and her Subcommittee on Water and Power. The hearing was called so that the Committee could review several new Title 16 bills that have been introduced by Western Members of Congress.

Commissioner Connor opposed most of these bills on the grounds that there was such a tremendous backlog of projects that authorizing new ones made little sense. When asked by Congressman George Miller [D:CA] whether Title 16 was a priority of the new Administration, the Commissioner replied, “Yes it is.”

His response goes to the very heart of a little discussed but very important policy issue facing the Federal government. We are talking here about the Corps of Engineers as well as the Bureau of Reclamation. In both agencies, authorization committees continually adopt new authority for projects. But current and past Administrations have not seen fit to provide the necessary funding. This leaves the Energy and Water Appropriations Committee with the unenviable task of creating a “new start” funding policy.

To nobody’s surprise, the Energy and Water Appropriators have chosen a “no new starts” policy as demonstrated by the report language from the FY10 Senate Energy and Water bill:

- “The Committee continues to believe that new starts are a vital part of the Corps’ program, there just are not sufficient funding resources to start new obligations at this time. If additional resources become available in conference, the Committee might re-evaluate this decision.”

What we have here is not unlike the Washington DC Metro during a snow storm. At rush hour, people flow out of their buildings and onto the Metro platforms waiting for a train. But the trains run sporadically. After a short time, the platform becomes thronged with people waiting for a train to come by. The same thing is happening with water resources projects waiting for “new start” funding.

This is a crucial issue for WESTCAS to be involved in. We have accepted an invitation from Commissioner Connor to meet with he and Anne Castle on Friday at 10:30 in the company of other Western water stakeholders. We will use the occasion to continue this dialogue on new starts and report back to you what is said at the meeting.

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