May 1, 2024

The Honorable James Orenschall
Chairman
Legislative Operations and Elections
Nevada Senate

RE: AJR10

Senator Orenschall:

Thank you for holding a hearing on AJR10. The Great Basin Water Network has spent more than 35 years advocating for sound water policy across the state, working to ensure that developers and politicians understand the connection between the Colorado River and water supplies elsewhere in the state.

Water connects us all. And the effort AJR10 champions is disconnected from reality.

Lake Mead is one-third full. The Colorado River is in a precarious state. Now is a time to be prudent and conservative about where and how we grow in the basins south of the Las Vegas Valley. The federal legislation championed by AJR10, the *Southern Economic Development and Conservation Act (SNEDCA)*, will allow for the sale of tens of thousands of acres of public lands between Henderson and the California border. In those valleys targeted by this concerted legislative process, there is no meaningful supply of groundwater to support the development many want. That means Southern Nevada will have to take the Colorado River to places it has never gone before.

Are you willing to tell your constituents that you support inviting another 800,000 people to the region with Lake Mead sitting at 33 percent full? That's what you need to consider with this legislation. You may also want to consider that the hydrology of the future on the Colorado River will only become more uncertain.

Right now, the Southern Nevada Water Authority is stretching every drop and working to make less go farther than once imaginable. I support that effort and believe that they will continue to stretch supplies without dangerous, expensive importation plans from rural Nevada. But you are only going to make that agency's job harder and more expensive. And, ultimately, that will fall on the backs of ratepayers and taxpayers.

Furthermore, it is erroneous to figure that AJR10 and SNEDCA are proposals solely about affordable housing. This is a bill about the future of the *Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act* (SNPLMA), congressional legislation passed in 1998 that has given Nevada the ability to sell off public land and reap some revenues from those sales.

SNEDCA expands that policy by allowing more lands to be sold. But, under the current law, there are still tens of thousands of acres available for sale. What is the rush? What is the need? There's also hundreds of millions of dollars sitting in an account that could be spent on select projects. Additionally, we have to consider a study from RTC that alleges more than 70,000 available acres for infill.

Why aren't we having a discussion about how to incentivize building communities where the infrastructure already exists?

That question is easily answered because, across the state, we are addicted to SNPLMA money.

SNPLMA allows proceeds from public lands sales to be distributed to some functions of local and state government. Public schools, water supplies, aviation, campgrounds, ballfields and other sectors have benefitted. I can't deny that.

But I can say that SNPLMA, SNEDCA and AJR10 are not policies to fundamentally make life better for working people or lawmakers trying to balance budgets.

SNPLMA is the reason why the satellite imagery of Las Vegas looks so different today than it did a quarter century ago. And it is one of the reasons why the cost of living is so much different too.

For your constituents today, there are more regressive taxes at the local level to fill gaps and higher utility bills across Nevada than in 1998. Nevada's public education system still ranks as one of the worst in the nation. The health care system is near the bottom rung. The well-being of children is worse in Nevada compared to other states. And, of course, housing affordability is a major problem as investors like Black Rock buy up residential blocks that were, you guessed it, built on lands sold off by the BLM.

AJR10 and SNEDCA stand for business as usual. Life will not get cheaper or better for your constituents.

There are no guarantees in AJR10 or SNEDCA that affordable housing actually gets built in any meaningful way. There are no mandates to make life more affordable. Let's be honest about what the bill actually says. Section 203 of SNEDCA speaks for itself.

I also can't deny the quid-pro-quo that some NGOs buy into as it relates to SNEDCA's conservation designations. Unfortunately, those designations will do nothing to defend our water supply. It's not a deal my organization, which fought for 30 years to stop Las Vegas ratepayers from having to pay for a multi-billion-dollar water importation project, will ever find reasonable.

What's reasonable is putting a pause on the AJR10-SNEDCA debate and considering new ways to grow with less water.

This resolution will be touted by certain members of the congressional delegation and used to get SNEDCA onto President Trump's desk. But I think you all would be wise to listen to the sagacious words of Rep. Dina Titus, who recently expressed concerns about SNEDCA.

Nevertheless, the seminal question for you all: Can you afford this?

AJR10 means more roads, schools, fire stations, police, electricity, hospitals, and other essential social services. Funds generated by SNPLMA, as history has shown, don't cover the costs.

Be prudent. Be conservative. Oppose AJR10.

Thank you,

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