

Introductory Comments for Congressman Raul Grijalva

Re: H.R. 2941, The Colorado River Indian Reservation
Boundary Correction Act

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Rahall and Members of the Committee, I am pleased to be here today to hear testimony on H.R. 2941, the Colorado River Indian Reservation Boundary Correction Act. I want to thank both Chairman Pombo and Ranking Member Rahall for their leadership on this issue and for their commitment to rectify some of the historic wrongs that have been done to the first Americans.

I also want to thank my colleagues in the Arizona delegation for their understanding of this issue and their support. I am grateful to Congressmen J.D. Hayworth, Rick Renzi, Ed Pastor, Jim Kolbe and Jeff Flake – all of whom have agreed to co-sponsor this long-overdue legislation.

I would like to acknowledge Chairman Eddy and the other members of the Colorado River Indian Tribes in the audience who have traveled so far to be with us today. This hearing is an important step in addressing a long-standing injustice. The Tribe has been waiting for almost 90 years to see the resolution of this issue, and it is my hope that we will soon be able to provide this for them. I look forward to hearing Chairman Eddy's valuable testimony on this issue.

In the early part of the 20th century, mining interests attempted to enter into a lease with the Colorado River Indian Tribes to begin mining operations in an area in the southern part of the reservation known as the La Paz. When the Tribe, whose cultural and religious beliefs precluded them from allowing mining on their reservation lands, denied a lease proposal to the mining company, the mining company went to Washington and successfully had land stripped away from the Tribe. The Tribe was never afforded a hearing on this matter, was never provided with an opportunity to challenge the decision, and was never compensated for the loss of its land.

Ironically, the mining company never opened a mining operation on the lands. Instead, all of the lands were transferred to the Bureau of Land Management and remain undeveloped desert. The BLM retained most of the lands, except for approximately 800 acres which were transferred to the Arizona State Lands Department in 1915 as part of the state's school trust program.

Since 1915, the Tribe has patiently but persistently attempted to have returned to them that which was taken from them and their ancestors.

I realize that there will be amendments to the proposed legislation dealing with state trust land, water rights and gaming issues. While I feel that the restrictions in the proposed amendments on water rights and gaming impose upon the basic sovereignty of the Tribe, I am also keenly aware of the political realities needed to approve this legislation. None of these restrictions would ever have been demanded of the Tribe had the federal government not taken this land from the Tribe in 1915. However, the Tribe has indicated its willingness to accept these amendments and therefore I defer to them on this matter. On the state trust lands issue, we are working with the State of Arizona and the BLM to execute an exchange of lands between these two entities at a location elsewhere in the state – a practice that has happened between the BLM and the state on several occasions in the past.

Today we have an opportunity to correct a wrong. The Tribe asks for no compensation for this injustice other than the return of its land. I am pleased to be joined by my colleagues from Arizona on both sides of the aisle in promoting this long overdue legislation and I thank the Chairman for his dedication in rectifying this historic injustice. I look forward to hearing the testimony today, and hope we can move this bill forward quickly to resolution for the Tribe.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask unanimous consent that testimony of Gene Fisher, La Paz County Supervisor be entered into the record. As you know, Mr. Fisher was invited to testify but was unable to

attend this hearing due to budgetary limitations.