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Opening Statement of Ranking Member Doc Hastings
Before the Committee on Natural Resources
On Thursday, October 1, 2009
Legislative hearing on
H.R. 1925 "America's Red Rock Wilderness Act of 2009"

Mr. Chairman, thank you for recognizing me for the purposes of making a brief opening statement.

There are six bills on the Subcommittee's agenda today. Five of these bills affect public lands issues relating to the congressional district represented by the bill's sponsor. These are Representatives looking after matters in the areas of the country that they were directly elected by their neighbors and fellow citizens to serve in Congress.

These five bills stand in stark contrast with the sixth, HR 1925, which would designate one-fifth of the entire State of Utah as the "Red Rock Wilderness Area." As of yesterday, this bill has 146 cosponsors in the House, and yet not a single one is from the State of Utah. I believe the Subcommittee is going to hear statements and testimony from every single member of the Utah delegation to the House and Senate, and that they will speak in bipartisan opposition to the bill.

This situation is very similar to that of HR 980, the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act. A hearing was held on that bill in May. The primary sponsor of that bill, like on the Red Rocks legislation, represented New York state, yet was proposing to lock up millions of acres of land in the Western states. Like Red Rocks, not a single cosponsor of the Northern Rockies bill represented a district affected by the legislation.

As the Ranking Republican on this Committee and as a Congressman representing a rural Western district, I am deeply troubled by legislation whose sponsors live far from the communities and districts that they are targeting.

Clearly, such legislation is being pushed by interests that are out of touch with and do not represent the views of those American citizens that would be directly affected by the legislation.

The communities and districts that will be hit by such legislation would suffer very real economic harm and lost jobs if these bills were to become law.

We have nearly ten percent unemployment in this country. Constituents face very tough economic times in every single congressional district.

And yet, some Members of Congress apparently have the luxury of spare time to divert away from helping their hurting constituents to press for extreme policies that would devastate the livelihoods and jobs of thousands of Americans living in small towns and communities far, far away from those they were elected to serve.

When it comes to such legislation, I would suggest that this Committee and Members of this House certainly have far better uses for their time and energies.

We can protect America's great natural spaces, yet it should not be done in a dictatorial manner that freezes out and refuses to even consider the views of the local citizens and local leaders who would be directly affected.

Successful and responsible conservation should, and will, be achieved only when the Americans who have the most at stake are listened to and respected, and not treated as a nuisance and deemed irrelevant.

Thank you. I look forward to the testimony of today's witnesses.

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