

Sen. Hatch Testimony – 9/13/11

Thank you Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva for the opportunity to discuss the need for the “*Utah Lands Sovereignty Act*.” It’s an honor to be here. I especially appreciate Chairman Bishop’s continued efforts to stand up for the needs of Utah here in the House of Representatives. Rob, it is a pleasure to serve with you.

Like most Western states, Utah is owned mostly by the federal government. This creates a unique set of challenges for Utahns. A lot of decisions that affect our daily lives are made by faceless bureaucrats who are thousands of miles away.

Many of them believe that it is their duty to “protect” the land from any future development. When the Antiquities Act passed Congress in 1906 it was intended to give the President the authority to designate small areas of historic or scientific interest on lands owned by the United States. In theory, this is a good idea. We live in a beautiful country and there are areas that merit protections. Unfortunately, this authority is too easily abused.

In September of 1996, President Clinton used the Antiquities Act to surprise Utah by establishing the 1.8 million acre Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. The State had no warning that this was coming, and once it was done we had no recourse.

With the stroke of the pen, 500 high-paying jobs in a rural Utah county disappeared.

We thought we had seen the worst that could be done with this Act to score political points at the expense of public-lands states. Last year when the so-called, Treasured Landscapes memo was leaked to this committee we realized that it could be much worse.

We found out that this President is not only willing to abuse the Antiquities Act, but that his Interior Department was getting ready to advise him on where to do it. Two of the areas they had identified for possible monument designation are in Utah.

That is why it is essential that the bills we are discussing today pass and the Congress be given the ultimate say on which areas will become national monuments.

Now don’t get me wrong. Utah is a beautiful place and there are areas that should be protected. But there are also vast areas that do not merit protection. Many of these areas also have vast stores of recoverable energy in the form of oil, natural gas and oil shale. The Utah delegation is working hard with local leaders as well as interested parties from both sides of the debate to identify those lands that should be preserved and those that should be opened for development. What we don’t need is the administration making those decisions for us.

My bill S. 1182 with the house companion HR 2147 will guarantee that Utah does not have any more surprise monument designations like we had back in 1996.

Ultimately the goal of this bill is to protect jobs. Some people will say we republicans want to throw away our nation’s most beautiful places for a few jobs and a few dollars. We just want to be able to use the process that is in place without worrying that our work will be overruled by a President desperate to score political points.

This is a very important issue to rural Utahns. We need to protect our state from any more surprises like the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument.

I will be happy to answer any of your questions.