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Opening Statement
The Honorable Tom McClintock
Chairman, Subcommittee on Water and Power
At the Oversight Hearing on
"Examining the Proposed Fiscal Year 2013 Spending, Priorities and the Missions of the
Bureau of Reclamation, the U.S. Geological Survey's Water Resources program and the Four
Power Marketing Administrations"
Tuesday, March 20, 2012

Today the Sub-committee on Water and Power meets to review the programs of the federal agencies charged with the responsibility of harnessing the vast water and power resources of the United States for the prosperity of our nation.

In the year since our last review, this Sub-committee has produced legislation to end the government-created regulatory drought that destroyed thousands of jobs, hundreds of thousands of acres of fertile and productive farmland and millions of dollars of produce in California's Central Valley. It has acted to dramatically increase hydro-electric generation on existing federal pipelines and facilities – with the potential to add the capacity equal to several Glen Canyon Dams. It acted to assure stable and low-cost prices to consumers of Hoover Dam power. It began the process of rolling back costly mandates that promise to drive up the price of electricity for Western Power Administration customers.

We have ended the process of using the taxes taken from one community to pay for water projects that exclusively benefit others and blocked the lunacy of tearing down hydro-electric dams on the Klamath.

Much more needs to be done. This year, we must produce legislation to remove the regulatory obstacles that are pointlessly and artificially making new water and power projects cost prohibitive. We must re-establish a practical structure to finance and approve those projects that meet clear and uniform cost-benefit analysis and that are paid for by the actual beneficiaries of these projects and not by general taxpayers.

Yet while the House is moving to restore abundance as the central objective of federal and water policy, it appears the administration is moving in precisely the opposite direction.

In today's testimony, the administration claims – quote – "... to increase available water supply for agricultural, municipal, industrial, and environmental uses in the western United States by 730,000 acre feet."

Let's be clear about what they mean by this. They're not talking about increasing our water supplies by 730,000 acre feet – they're talking about reducing human consumption by that amount. The future they are planning is one where families are encouraged, threatened and, if need be, forced to reduce consumption through higher water and electricity bills, higher taxes and intrusive government regulations.

Ironically, this administration sees nothing wrong with dumping millions of acre feet of water into the ocean, but it is aghast that a family might actually prefer a toilet that works on the first flush. It would enthusiastically place expensive and unreliable windmills on existing federal rights of way, but is actively opposed to simply allowing private parties to put inexpensive, reliable small hydro generators on those same rights of way at no taxpayer expense.

I find the future outlined by the testimony presented to this sub-committee to be indescribably dreary and depressing. It paints a future of increasingly severe government-induced shortages, higher and higher electricity and water prices, massive taxpayer subsidies to politically well-connected and favored industries, and a permanently declining quality of life for our children who will be required to stretch and ration every drop of water and every watt of electricity in their bleak and dimly lit homes – homes in which gravel replaces green lawns and the toilets constantly back up.

I see a different future for our nation: I see a new era of clean, cheap and abundant hydro-electricity. I see great new reservoirs to store water in wet years to assure abundance in dry ones. I see a future in which families can enjoy the prosperity that abundant water and electricity provides; and the quality of life that comes from that prosperity. I see a nation whose children can look forward to a green lawn, a backyard garden, a family swimming pool, affordable air-conditioning in the summer and heating in the winter, brightly lit homes and cities and abundant and affordable groceries from America's agricultural cornucopia.

These are two very different visions of America, and a choice must be made – not just by this sub-Committee or this Congress, but by the American people.

I have great confidence that when this sub-committee meets a year from now to consider the programs of these water and power agencies, those agencies will be under new management dedicated to restoring them to their traditional role of producing an abundance of clean, cheap and reliable water and power. I know I speak for the majority of this sub-committee when I pledge that we will be ready to assist a new administration in achieving that objective.