

Committee on Resources

Testimony

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State of Washington House of Representatives State Representative, 12th District

Congressional Hearing on H.R. 1811

Written Testimony

September 9, 1997

It is a great honor to be here today to join my good friend Congressman Hastings and many of his colleagues in supporting H.R. 1811 . . . to return stewardship of the Hanford Reach area of the Columbia River to the state and local communities of Washington state.

I must tell you how truly blessed I feel not only as Speaker of the House in the other Washington, as I understand you folks call it around here. . . but to speak for the people who live in the region of our state that is the subject of this measure.

If you have had the opportunity to visit Washington state, you no doubt were struck by the abundance of natural beauty and natural resources that provide for our citizens a quality of life that is unmatched.

It is incumbent upon all of us . . . whether in our lives as private citizens or in our roles as elected leaders . . . to be good stewards of those unique and limited resources . . . to manage them effectively, both for today and for the future.

The focus of this bill is the Hanford Reach area located in the south central region of Washington. This area is known as one of the most productive agricultural areas in the Pacific Northwest.

Prior to its inclusion in the Hanford control zone, the federal Bureau of Reclamation purchased over twenty-seven thousand acres of the Hanford Reach, known as the Wahluke Slope, with the intent of future development in the Columbia Basin Project.

However, in November 1943 the Wahluke Slope Control Zone was established by the federal government as part of the Hanford Reservation. The need for a large security and control zone around the Department of Energy's Hanford project caused the forced relocation of citizens of Hanford, White Bluff, Wahluke, and the surrounding agricultural lands that had been settled prior to 1900.

Now, more than fifty years later, the Department of Energy has deactivated its production reactors at the Hanford Reservation and changed its overall mission for Hanford from plutonium production to environmental restoration. The need for a large security and control zone no longer exists due to these changes.

As the Department of Energy goes through this process, it will make decisions on how to remove portions of its lands from its control.

The Wahluke Slope Control Zone is currently managed as a wildlife area. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages one portion of these lands, and the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife manages the remainder of these lands.

Broad support exists for the preservation of the natural beauty and topography of this area, including protecting the White Bluffs from sloughing into the Columbia River, prohibiting dredging and damming, and providing for a substantial buffer zone on both sides of the river.

It is also widely recognized that approximately one-third of the Wahluke Slope contains significant areas of land suitable for farming. The vast majority of the area would remain pristine wildlife habitat.

The balanced development of this land would achieve the long-awaited completion of irrigation on the Wahluke Slope and help protect and enhance the wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities.

Resulting property tax and income tax revenues from this new farm land would be an immediate and significant benefit. Farmland development would result in millions of dollars in capital investment for farm equipment of all kinds, the great majority of it manufactured in the United States by American workers.

These facts raise one critical question: How can we assure the people of those communities that the best possible job will be done to protect and preserve the Hanford Reach . . . and the many other vital areas entrusted to our care?

When it comes to the protection and proper stewardship of these resources . . . I believe absolutely that we should vest the greatest responsibility in the government entities and elected officials that are closest to home . . . because this is where the people will find the greatest accountability and responsibility from their government.

It is the officials in the state of Washington and in our local communities who have the greatest knowledge of these issues . . . and the greatest understanding of the needs and desires of the people and families who will be affected by government decisions.

By returning decision-making to the local level, you can help ensure the people we represent will have the greatest faith and confidence in the stewardship of our public lands, waters and other resources.

Just as the citizens of my state must have faith in government's ability to manage our resources . . . I would urge that Congress have faith in the state and local officials who are closest to . . . and most accountable to . . . the people.

Earlier this year, the Washington State Legislature formally adopted legislation asking Congress to transfer the Wahluke Slope portion of the Hanford Reach to three Washington state counties. The legislation read, in part:

To the Honorable William J. Clinton, President of the United States, and the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, in Congress assembled, and to the Director of the Department of Energy:

We...Your Memorialists respectfully pray that, except for needed buffer zones, the present boundaries of the Department of Energy's Hanford control zone on the Wahluke Slope be reduced to the area south of the

Columbia River and that the Wahluke Slope presently under the custody and control of the Department of Energy be transferred in total to the counties of Grant, Franklin, and Adams for the purpose of returning the land to its former agricultural use, as well as for wildlife and recreational areas along the Hanford Reach.

This important legislation received bipartisan support. I believe that it was approved by the Washington State Legislature because we believe there are two natural resources on this slope. The wildlife resources...and the land itself. We believe that local control will allow those with the most knowledge of the land and the resources to decide how the area should be used, managed and protected.

I believe the proposal which Congressman Hastings has put forward addresses the wishes of the Washington State Legislature, local elected officials, and the citizens of Washington State. Careful consideration of the entire area will result in a balance between agricultural development and habitat preservation.

In addition, careful management of the Wahluke Slope will not only benefit wildlife and recreational users, but the local economies as well in the form of an increased tax base.

These goals can ONLY be accomplished at the local level. The Federal government has neither the time nor the money needed to manage this area effectively by itself. In order for this land to be properly maintained, it must be done primarily at a local level. This is clearly one case where bigger government is not better government. Local control is clearly a win-win situation.

Again, thank you for recognizing the importance of this issue. I urge you to support local control of the Hanford Reach.

I urge your support for H.R. 1811.
Thank you.

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