

**Opening Statement**

**The Honorable Paul Gosar, D.D.S.**

**Chairman**

**House Water, Power and Oceans Subcommittee**

**Oversight Hearing on “*Examining the Missions and Impacts of the President’s Proposed Fiscal Year 2017 Budgets of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Power Marketing Administrations*”**

**March 22, 2016**

Thank you for holding this hearing. It’s important that this Subcommittee perform its oversight duties on the proposed budgets of both Democratic and Republican Administrations. There has been a long bipartisan history of this budget oversight function.

Today’s hearing provides a forum to not only understand whether ratepayers and taxpayers are getting a good deal but also – like the distinguished Chairman said – to debate philosophies over the role of the federal government, especially when we have a 19 trillion dollar plus debt.

As many of you know, our Western way of life and our economy are the direct result of the multi-purpose water projects that impound water for millions of consumers and harness the power of moving water to produce emissions-free energy. These federal projects were visionary and continue to provide benefits to this day.

But, the agency managing many of these projects has become a shell of its former self. The Bureau of Reclamation was once a construction agency that encouraged progress – it is now an agency that stifles the visions of those who actually want to build their own water storage projects as we have heard repeatedly about the proposed Sites Reservoir in northern California.

While it engages in paralysis-by-analysis approaches to building multi-purpose projects, it has no problem doling out grants on replacing residential toilets and replacing grass. Literally, the federal government is now in your bathroom and your back yard in some places. This begs the question of why Arizonans, Louisianans or any other taxpayer around the country should be paying for such things that should be solely in the local domain. This is concerning and, for this reason, I want to work with the Chairman in asking each of the appropriate agencies before us today to submit their grant expenditures over the last decade for closer inspection.

Meanwhile, the agency is held hostage to the whims of the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service when it comes to the Endangered Species Act. Just ask the thousands of unemployed farmworkers in the San Joaquin Valley about who has more sway in this Administration: the Fish and Wildlife Service or the Bureau of Reclamation.

I also want to take a moment to express my concern over the Western Area Power Administration's proposed growth. Eight bipartisan members from Arizona's House delegation sent an appropriations request last week to the Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee to highlight its concern over the agency's spending and staff growth. The budget proposes 51 new employees, yet many of the agency's customers have highlighted the fact that they have added just one or two new employees to handle the same responsibilities for nearly half of these proposed staff.

The agency is no longer being accountable to the ratepayers, who in my State are very concerned with its mission building and headquarters growth. That's why Democrats and Republicans from Arizona have triggered congressional oversight and direction to keep the agency in check. Whether rates are higher or lower than others is irrelevant because Arizonans are being asked to pay in part for these proposals. Every little budget item adds up to create higher rates. They

have a right to challenge such behavior and we are acting on their behalf through our duties.

As the Chairman pointed out, this will be the last Obama Administration's budget and thankfully so. Although the bar is very low, we hope the next Administration will do better.