

Good morning. I am Buster Johnson, Chairman of the Mohave County Board of Supervisors in Arizona and Co-Chairman of the AZ/UT Local Economic Coalition comprised of Mohave County, AZ, and Washington, Kane, San Juan and Garfield Counties in Utah, along with the town of Fredonia in Coconino County, AZ. All of these counties and town in northern Arizona and southern Utah are directly affected by uranium exploration, mining and milling, and therefore are tremendously negatively impacted by the Department of the Interior's recent withdrawal of 1 million acres of the country's richest uranium resources. You'll note on the Northern Arizona Land Status map that the withdrawal area (the three parcels outlined in red) sits in a virtual "sea" of federal lands which are already closed to mining (the blue cross-hatched areas plus the green Grand Canyon National Park). In fact, the Arizona Strip, the area lying between the Utah border south to the Grand Canyon, contains less than 1 percent of privately-owned lands, and federal ownership in most of the surrounding counties averages 80 percent or more.

The federal government's control over the region's lands has forced the residents to rely on tourism-based jobs which are tied to the area's numerous national parks, BLM, forests, game preserves, monuments, etc., and has resulted in low-paying, seasonal employment and a resulting unemployment rate of 18% (twice the national average) and an annual wage of \$26,000 (far below the national wage index of \$41,000). These figures don't include the rates from nearby Native American tribes. Tribal members of the Navajo Nation have a current unemployment rate of 50% and an annual per capita income of about \$7,100.

A prime example of the economic health of a community is its schools. Kane County School District in Utah borders the Arizona Strip where 8 uranium deposits were mined on BLM lands during the 1980s and until the mid 90s and the timber industry thrived on US Forest Service lands. Shortly after the uranium and timber industries shut down, the student population started dropping and went from a high of 1459 students to today's 1175 students—a drop of 284 students in 14 years. This loss translates into a revenue loss every year of \$2,840,000 to our school system as well as to the general economy. The impact has been significant. Teaching positions and programs were eliminated; schools shrank to two or three students per grade level, drastically affecting their educational opportunities; and a secondary school closed forcing students to be transported many miles into Arizona.

Despite the claims of uranium mining opponents that tourism has and will continue to be the "bedrock" of this region's economy, restaurants, hotels and retail businesses continue to close and younger residents continue to move to larger towns and metropolitan areas such as Phoenix, Las Vegas and Salt Lake City to find jobs. The Obama Administration's insistence that uranium mining will harm the Grand Canyon ecosystem thereby ruining the region's tourism-based economy is pure fear mongering and totally ignores uranium mining's track record in the area. The reality is that during a 10-year period from 1981 to 1990, while uranium mining was in full swing in northern Arizona, visitation **doubled** to Grand Canyon National Park (from 2 to 4 million visitors), Zion National Park and Lake Powell National Recreation Area. During this time, safe, environmentally friendly mining occurred with little or no notice by visitors to nearby attractions on federal lands.

Exactly what is the Administration forcing these local communities to give up by shoving the northern Arizona withdrawal down their collective throats? According to the September 2009 study, "Economic Impact of Uranium Mining on Coconino and Mohave Counties, Arizona", there will be over a 40-year period:

- 1,078 new jobs in the project area
- \$40 million annually from payroll
- \$29.4 billion in output
- \$2 billion in federal and state corporate income taxes
- \$168 million in state severance taxes
- \$9.5 million in mining claims payments and fees to local governments

I have worked to develop a coalition of local support to assist you in Congress by putting together a coalition of counties and towns (Mohave, Fredonia, Kingman, etc in Arizona and then have joined with our friends in Utah (Washington, Kane, Garfield and San Juan Counties). How does this help you in Congress? It lets you know that we are real people, we are fairly political savvy, and that every new job created in our sparse part of the country is worth 10 times to us what one job created in a big city is worth. I believe the examples I just shared emphasize that point.

Together with my elected colleagues from the cities and counties of N. AZ & S. UT, we have put together a well thought out plan, which will, we believe ultimately bring us success.

Success for us is fully REVOKING THE SALAZAR WITHDRAWAL of the lands which were set aside for us to mine in the 1984 Congressional agreement – the Arizona Wilderness Act. Each of you, like us are no doubt offended to know that with one single misuse of Executive Branch authority, in this case, the withdrawal itself, overturns the express will of Congress, which by law and in the Constitution itself granted authority expressly TO THE CONGRESS, THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH, over how federal government owned lands should be used. (Again, see 1984 AZ Wilderness Act and Article I Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution.) On behalf of all my local government colleagues in Arizona and Utah, I urge you to make this Obama Administration action, a short term detour, not a permanent edict. Here's our plan to overturn it which requires your steadfast help!

First, local governments in AZ & UT intend to file legal action shortly challenging the Administration failure to coordinate with us. Likewise, the aggrieved companies intend to file suit challenging the Administration's arbitrary and capricious use of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Federal Land Policy & Management Act (FLPMA) and the Obama Interior Department's total failure to demonstrate any threat to the Grand Canyon and its watershed.

Meanwhile, our leaders in Congress, Senator's McCain, Hatch, Kyl, Lee, Murkowski, Barrasso, and Alexander along with House Natural Resources Committee Chairman, Hastings, Subcommittee Chairman Bishop, Arizonans Franks, Gosar, Flake, Quayle, and Shweikert, Utahns Chaffetz and Matheson and dozens of all of you, are all looking for legislative opportunities to overturn the Obama/Salazar N. Arizona withdrawal and will continue working on that objective until this wrong is righted and economically crucial and environmentally justified mining is allowed to go forward the way it was envisioned by the late Morris Udall and Barry Goldwater back in 1984. This is our plan & with your help, 2012 will be the year we set the stage for recovering these lands, our lands, and giving them back to the people of the nation to use to reduce our 90% dependency on foreign uranium. Uranium which is critical for our long term nuclear power needs. Nuclear power provides base load power. We have plenty of fuel waiting to be used if only we could unlock the lock which the environmentalists now in charge of our government, would be made to turn the key. That's what I'm here to ask you to do.

Thank you for this opportunity to address the Western Caucus today.