

VERBAL STATEMENT--DRAFT

STATEMENT OF

THE HONORABLE BUSTER JOHNSON

SUPERVISOR

MOHAVE COUNTY, ARIZONA

ON BEHALF OF

MOHAVE COUNTY

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES NACo

QUADSTATE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY

ARIZONA/UTAH ECONOMIC COALITION

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCES

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

WEDNESDAY, JULY 13, 2015

- Chairman Lamborn, Ranking Member Lowenthal and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to testify in support of Congressman Gosar's bill H.R. 2663, the Public Land Renewable Energy Development Act of 2015 (PLREDA).
- My name is Buster Johnson and I am the Vice Chairman of the Mohave County, Arizona Board of Supervisors and Past President of the Az Assoc of Counties.
- Today, I am testifying on behalf of myself, the National Association of Counties (NACo), as Chairman of QuadState Local Govt Authority and the Az/Ut Economic Development Coalition.

- Mohave County is located in N/W Arizona adjacent to the Colorado River.
- It is the fifth largest county in the United States.
- More than three quarters of Mohave County is federal tax exempt land.
- We have eight National protected areas and eighteen Wilderness areas.
- We provide the essential services at our expense on all of these federally owned lands from revenues generated off of twenty-five percent of private lands.

- This bill: (1) Encourages responsible renewable energy development;
- (2) Provides equitable revenue sharing with the counties that provide critical services; and
- (3) Takes a balanced approach to renewable energy development and conservation.

## **Responsible Renewable Energy Development**

- Mohave's climate and landscape offers some of the highest solar and wind energy potential in the nation.
- The bill will help create good paying jobs, diversify rural economy's, and spur economic growth.
- In public lands counties, the single greatest barrier to project development is the protracted federal permitting process which is simply not an issue on private lands.

- This legislation creates a straight forward and streamline permitting process for renewal energy projects being developed on federal public lands.
- The streamlining provisions included in the bill will lead to faster turnarounds.
- Simply put, there is no reason for the BLM to take several years to permit a project when our county offices can issue permits in weeks.

## **Equitable Revenue Sharing With Counties**

- As an elected official, it is my responsibility to weigh the pros and cons of policy proposals.
- Developing renewable energy projects on public lands will create local jobs and promote greater access to energy.
- However counties will be called upon to provide essential infrastructure and county services to support them.
  
- Counties build and maintain 45 percent of America's roads, 39 percent of the nation's bridges and we invest hundreds of millions of dollars annually to provide public safety, health, solid waste disposal and other essential services on federal public lands.
  
- Especially in large public lands counties of the west, like mine, the costs of providing essential services on public lands can be significant.

- Representative Gosar's bill strikes a careful balance, encouraging the development of renewable energy resources and sharing revenues with local governments to offset the impacts of renewable energy development, as is already the case with other forms of energy development on public lands.
- The legislation establishes a distribution where 25 percent would be shared with county governments,
- For counties, revenue sharing is a critical component of the bill before the subcommittee

- Recent University study's found that if this bill were enacted Mohave County would receive \$519,375 in royalty payments from existing renewable energy projects.
- The State of Arizona and its' counties would receive nearly \$4.6 million in new royalty revenue and these amounts would only grow as new projects come online.
- Sharing royalties with counties will help provide local taxpayers with additional relief from the costs associated with tax-exempt federal land and it will provide the much needed resources we need to provide critical infrastructure and services on public lands.
- The bill as written ensures that PILT is supplemented and not replaced as a result of the legislation, an important provision for public lands counties like mine.



- **Balanced Development and Conservation**
- Finally, the reality is that in terms of multiple uses of federal land, renewable energy development along with oil, gas, mining and timber harvesting provides the high wage jobs that allow individuals to afford recreational tourism.
- These uses represent the cake that allows the frosting of tourism to take place.

- This bill helps the environment too. In fact, in this legislation, revenues not dedicated to the federal government, the states or counties, would be deposited in a fund for fish and wildlife habitat restoration.
- The fund will be utilized to enhance hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreational opportunities which can further grow local economies.
- Thank you again Congressman Gosar for your leadership and vision in striking that important balance with this legislation and thank you Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing.