

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

R. BRUCE JOSTEN
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT
GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20062-2000
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March 12, 2014

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the world's largest business federation representing the interests of more than three million businesses of all sizes, sectors, and regions, as well as state and local chambers and industry associations, and dedicated to promoting, protecting, and defending America's free enterprise system, strongly supports H.R. 3189, the "Water Rights Protection Act." This bipartisan bill would protect water supplies and property rights from federal agency overreach by ensuring that the federal government cannot condition its approval of permits, leases, and other use agreements on the restriction or loss of applicable state water rights.

While eastern states typically apply riparian law to water rights questions, western states generally use the prior appropriation doctrine, which is "first in time, first in right." State laws protecting waters for multiple uses in western states have been in existence for over a century. Water rights are obtained by diverting water for "beneficial use," which can include domestic use, irrigation, manufacturing, mining, hydropower, municipal use, agriculture, and others depending on state law.

Recent federal actions have threatened this longstanding federal-state water rights relationship. Agencies increasingly require unnecessary and restrictive use conditions that must be met before land owners can receive or renew a permit. H.R. 3189 would prohibit the conditioning of any permit, lease, or other use agreement on the transfer of any water right to the United States by the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture.

H.R. 3189 would protect water uses while ensuring that state water laws are upheld by prohibiting federal agencies from imposing permit conditions that requires privately held water rights to be transferred to the federal government in exchange for a new or renewed permit to operate on federal land, and would ensure that the longstanding federal-state water relationship is maintained and not compromised by the placement of unreasonable permit conditions.

Additionally, the Chamber supports an amendment expected to be offered by Rep. Mullin that would clarify protections for Native American tribes' water rights by 1) ensuring that that the federal government cannot make Native American tribes apply for or acquire water rights under state law for the federal government rather than acquiring the rights for themselves, 2) prohibiting the federal government from using permits, approvals, and other land management agreements to take the water rights of Native American tribes without just compensation, and 3)

ensuring that nothing in the bill as passed limits or expands the reserved water rights or treaty rights of federally recognized Native American tribes.

The Chamber strongly supports H.R. 3189 and the amendment expected to be offered by Rep. Mullin. **The Chamber may consider including votes on, or in relation to, this bill in our *How They Voted* scorecard.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Bruce Josten". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "R." and last name "Josten" being the most prominent parts.

R. Bruce Josten