

SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
TESTIMONY REGARDING S1689
by BUD HETTINGA

To Senator Jeff Bingaman and Committee members:

I feel compelled to write this letter because of the depth of feelings I have regarding the issues I will address. I am speaking as a member of the livestock industry, a rancher; a worried rancher; a rancher incensed by what I have learned and observed, and by the state of the Wilderness debate in Doña Ana County.

Much of the cattle industry in New Mexico, as in the other western states, is based on permits and leases on federal and state lands. That puts us at a distinct disadvantage, with so much of the land on which we ranch not privately owned and subject to ever-increasing regulation. Our State has been and will always be a relatively poor state because of this. But more on point, it subjects us and our ranches to unrealistic proposals from environmentalists such as we now face in Doña Ana and Luna Counties, NM .

In recent years, with proliferation in the environmental community and their constant pressure for more and more "conservation" areas, this disadvantage has been expanded.

I am very concerned that trend will continue. Will there be any public-lands ranching a decade or two from now?

In your positions, you will have a lot to do with developing the answer to that question. Speaking honestly, you appear to me to be on a course to adversely affect the answer, a course which is destroying public-lands ranching.

The entire livestock industry in NM and in the other western states are closely watching the Wilderness debate in Doña Ana County. There is also constant concern about where the next battle will be fought. I feel that without changes to S1689, you are in the process of greatly harming our industry in Doña Ana County. Seemingly, much more of the same is on the horizon elsewhere in NM and the other states.

Legislation such as S1689 appears to be entirely for the "benefit" of the environmental organizations, who, relatively speaking, have absolutely nothing at stake.

Please rethink your positions. Are you really okay with acting on our opponents' largely unproven claims of tremendous support, while ignoring the evidence provided of strong support for our positions? If you allow it, you will find yourselves dealing with ever more so called "citizens' proposals" (read fund raising "campaigns"), and in a position of harming more and more livestock producers, to satisfy the environmentalists. I assure you these feelings are shared by many. I don't believe you can continue on that path without alienating the entire western livestock industry, and severely damaging your relationships with the cattle producers, good people, in our State.

That leads me to a few questions, which I ask with all sincerity:

Do you believe that what the environmentalists "want", is more important to New Mexico and the other western states than what our communities want, but more importantly, what they want and need? S1689 as written leaves this open to question.

Do you attach importance to our public-lands livestock industry remaining healthy and viable?

Do you really believe that our public lands will be better "protected" and managed under S1689 than they are today, or could be under less restrictive management?

What can we do to slow the attacks on our industry? 110,000,000 acres of Wilderness is enough, or surely close to enough. The lands are already being preserved and well protected under multiple use, NLCS, etc.

America has prospered due to the richness of our resources and the spirit and will and industriousness of our people. Time spent in lengthy and contentious battles over issues which do nothing to preserve those attributes, and divide us on ideological grounds, severely sap our energy and our strengths. Constant and increasing attacks against productive and hard-working people are damaging and unnecessary. Please discourage the attacks, and spend your time instead dealing with issues of tangible benefit to the American people, such as reducing America's dependency with regard to energy needs.

I have written this to ask for your support. We are good people doing the right thing, and we, too, are your constituents. We need your help.

You have been provided a lot of very credible information calling for needed changes to S1689, addressing national security, law enforcement, flood control, grazing management, and other important issues. Please work with our citizens to fully address these concerns.

Jeff, I've known you a long time. I can't believe that you are turning a deaf ear to those of us who are hard-working taxpayers, and I can't believe you are allowing a small, vocal minority to put us out of business.

Sincerely,

Bud Hettinga

575-644-7477

budhettinga@yahoo.com