

A VISION FOR THE WEST
The Western Caucus in Action!
Thursday, March 9th, 2017, 2:00pm
U.S. Capitol, Senate Visitors Center, Room 209-08
Statement of Chairman Paul A. Gosar

Good afternoon everyone,

I'm Congressman Paul Gosar and I represent Arizona's Fourth Congressional District.

I am also Chairman of the Congressional Western Caucus, Chairman of the Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources, and Vice-Chairman of the Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on the Interior.

I am thrilled to be joined today by new Senate Western Caucus Chairman Steve Daines as we lay out our vision for the Western Caucus and the new Congress. I have known Steve for several years since his days in the House and we have always had a great working relationship. Chairman Daines and his team have already invigorated the Caucus and I couldn't be more excited about working with him closely to deliver on the priorities of our Membership and constituents.

The Congressional Western Caucus is an informal group of Members dedicated to protecting private property rights, strengthening local control, fostering economic growth, preserving multiple-use of public lands and increasing energy independence.

The Congressional Western Caucus was founded during the 103rd Congress in 1993. Initially, the Caucus was born in the West, out of concerns of undue federal interference with rural, agricultural, timber, water, mining and hunting values that had been a part of our lives for centuries. The Caucus was founded to fight federal overreach, promote rural values and preserve our uniquely American way of life. Over time, the Caucus has grown beyond the West, allying with Members of Congress from all across the country who share our values and our vision of a stronger America.

Since I took over leadership of the House Caucus on November 30, 2016 we have added 23 new Members and total Caucus membership currently includes 66 Members in the House of Representatives. Our Members represent 31 states and the American Samoa. In the House, I have announced a new executive team comprised of 10 Members. All of these Members are specialists in their respective areas. These positions and full list of Members can be found on our website at westerncaucus.house.gov. We are a powerful voting block and are going to be a real force this Congress. Under my leadership, the Caucus has implemented a weekly address and has been producing engaging graphics and videos. Chief Infrastructure and Forestry Officer Bruce Westerman gave this week's address.

The Caucus has been focused on fostering an environment for job creation and economic growth. One of the Caucus's biggest legislative efforts this Congress has been introducing and passing

bills utilizing the Congressional Review Act to rollback job-killing Obama regulations. To date, we have already passed 4 of our 14 bills through the House and one into law. Rep. Cheney's CRA bill to rollback BLM's Planning 2.0 Rule passed the Senate this week and is also expected to be signed into law in the coming days. The Caucus has been working hand in hand with the new Administration on these regulatory reform efforts.

Just last week President Trump signed an Executive Order to dismantle the Waters of the United States Rule, commonly referred to as WOTUS. The order was praised by our Members as this job-killing water grab would have negative consequences for small businesses, private property owners, ag producers and water users throughout the country. Executive Vice-Chairman Tipton and I had the privilege of joining President Trump in the oval office for the signing of this important executive order.

Also last week, former Caucus Member and new Department Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke signed a Secretarial Order overturning a midnight United States Fish and Wildlife Service directive that banned the use of traditional lead based ammunition and tackle on federal lands. Western Caucus Member Jason Smith and the Caucus led on this issue and sent a letter requesting this action that was signed by 32 members in the House.

Besides rolling back job-killing regulations from the previous Administration, our Members are putting forth proactive economic solutions. We are coordinating closely with the Committees of jurisdiction and the Administration on a new infrastructure package that will create high quality jobs and strengthen local communities. Hearings have begun and our Members have been busy compiling lists of local priorities. More details on this infrastructure package will be revealed in the coming weeks.

The Caucus will also be involved in helping facilitate Indian Water rights settlements and other important water rights projects for local communities. There are at least two Indian water rights settlements that I have been working with stakeholders in Arizona on and several other Members have indicated these are also a priority in their districts.

Additionally, the Caucus will focus on strengthening local control and returning power back to the people living closest to the land. President Obama exceeded the intent of the Antiquities Act more than any other president in the history of this country. By the end of his presidency, he designated or expanded 27 national monuments. These unilateral declarations locked up over 548 million acres of land and water. Local communities deserve to have their voices heard before a president can lock up millions of acres of land with one stroke of a pen. Reforming the outdated 1906 Antiquities will be a priority for our membership this Congress.

Another important issue for our membership, that should be handled by states and local stakeholders, is Sage Grouse conservation and management. While Arizona does not have to deal with Sage Grouse issues directly, this is an important issue that directly impacts Western Caucus Members and communities throughout the West. Western Members are committed to overturning the de facto Sage Grouse listing implemented by the Department of Interior through the Resource Management Plan and Land and Resource Management Plan amendments. These misguided amendments were not warranted and sought to prevent responsible mineral

production and other activities across 11 western states, including 67 million acres of land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the United States Forest Service, and tens of millions acres of Federal mineral estate. The associated 10 million acre mineral withdraw is an unauthorized power grab that is already causing significant harm to local communities.

Endangered Species Act modernization is also something being pursued by our membership. This outdated law needs some updates to bring it into the 21st Century. The current process is not working for local communities or animals, many of which have lingered on the list for decades. Two good bills that passed the House in the 113th Congress that will improve transparency and strengthen local involvement in this process were just introduced last week by Chief Rules Officer Dan Newhouse.

Another key push for the Caucus that allows for returning power back to the people living closest to the land involves the nomination process. On January 12th, a dozen of our Members sent President Trump a letter encouraging him to appoint Westerners to key positions within his administration that affect our livelihoods. The Caucus has seen some great success in that regard and was intimately involved in supporting the successful nominations of Administrator Pruitt, Secretary Zinke and Secretary Perry.

Increasing energy independence is a high priority of the Caucus this Congress. Vice-Chairman for Policy and Appropriations Mark Amodei has reintroduced the National Strategic and Critical Minerals Production Act. This commonsense legislation will create hundreds of thousands of jobs by reducing U.S. dependence on foreign minerals from countries like China.

The Keystone Pipeline is a priority for our Members and we are pleased to see President Trump take action to help move this process forward. In January of 2014, the U.S. State Department stated for the second time that the pipeline would have NO significant impact on climate change. Conservative estimates from the State Department at that time also projected that the Keystone XL Pipeline would support more than 42,000 jobs. Moreover, it has bipartisan support - even labor unions support it.

It is far past time that we get this important project done.

Our Members support an all-of-the-above energy approach that utilizes all domestic energy sources including, coal, oil and natural gas, as well as renewables. I have reintroduced the Public Lands Renewable Energy Development Act, legislation that streamlines the permitting process for wind, solar and geothermal energy projects on public lands, does not require federal subsidies, and creates a revenue source to assist local governments in their efforts to deliver critical services. We need to pass this important bipartisan bill.

The Committees are also open to the idea of bringing up the energy package that we were almost able to get across the finish line last Congress. A mining package and sportsmen's package are additional pieces of legislation that our Members want to see moved this Congress and that are on leadership's radar.

Maintaining healthy forests is another priority for Members of the Caucus. We need legislation similar to Rep. Bruce Westerman's bill from last Congress that the House passed that will allow us to get in and actively manage our forests. The Caucus is committed to working with the new administration and leadership to enact these commonsense reforms.

Ensuring affordable and safe domestic food production for American families is also a priority for the Western Caucus in the Farm Bill. Hearings have already begun in the House and Western Caucus Member Mike Conaway has made reauthorization a priority.

Finally, Caucus Members are committed to pursuing reauthorization of the Payments In Lieu of Taxes and Secure Rural School programs. As counties across the United States work to balance their budgets, it is essential that Congress act to reaffirm the federal government's long-standing commitment to public land counties by fully-funding SRS and PILT while working to find a permanent solution.

There are numerous other issues that Western Caucus Members will be leading on this Congress. We are filled with optimism and are excited to work with the new administration to Make America and the West Great Again.

I appreciate the opportunity to highlight some of the main priorities of our Membership and to lay out the vision for the Western Congress for the new Congress. I will conclude there and take questions. Thank you.