

Evaluating Water Policy in New Mexico

Editor's Note: The following papers represent a transcription of the panelists' remarks made at the conference; no follow-up papers were submitted by the speakers. Remarks were edited for publication by the editor. The speakers did not review this version of their presentation, and the editor is responsible for any transcription and editing errors.



Moderated by Aron Balok, Pecos Valley Artesian Conservancy District

Aron Balok grew up on a ranch in northwestern New Mexico, near the town of Fence Lake. He graduated from Ramah High School in 1991, and from New Mexico State University in 1997 with a BS in agriculture, extension, and education. Today, Balok is the superintendent of the Pecos Valley Artesian Conservancy District. He has been with the district for about 11 years. He also serves on the Interstate Stream Commission.

Balok has a passion for New Mexico's heritage and a deep appreciation for the complexity of the state's water issues. He has been professionally involved in water-related issues for the past 14 years. He and his wife, Hayly, and two of their three daughters live in Roswell, and their oldest daughter is a student at NMSU.

Rep. Derrick Lente, New Mexico House District 65

Derrick J. Lente is a member of the New Mexico House of Representatives, representing House District 65. He was recognized as a "Rising Star" by the Democratic Party of New Mexico and received the All Pueblo Governors Council's "Governor's Award." Lente serves on numerous local and national boards focused on agriculture, education, the environment, and health.

Previously, Lente was a professor and speaker at universities across the United States and has experience working on federal, state, and tribal issues. He was also an entrepreneur who earned returns on investments in offices he acquired in New Mexico and California, employing hundreds in the state and thousands more along the way.

Lente graduated from Bernalillo High School and holds two BA degrees in Intercultural Communications and English from The University of New Mexico, as well as a JD from The University of New Mexico School of Law.



Rep. Melanie Stansbury, New Mexico House District 28

Melanie Stansbury is proud to represent New Mexico's 28th House District in Albuquerque. A native New Mexican, born in Farmington and raised in Albuquerque, Stansbury has spent her career working in natural resources, science, and community development with a focus on water security. In addition to serving in the state legislature, Stansbury works as a policy consultant—advising philanthropic, nonprofit, research, and other organizations. Stansbury previously worked in Washington, D.C., as a staff member in the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources and in the White House Office of Management and Budget. A sociologist with a background in the natural sciences, Stansbury has worked on land and water issues across New Mexico and the U.S., including projects on water policy, management, and conflict resolution, and as a science educator early in her career. She is currently working on a statewide effort to modernize New Mexico's water policies and practices.

Aron Balok: Good morning, Representative Lente. How are you?

Rep. Lente: Good afternoon. I'm well. How is everybody else?

Balok: Loving the snow.

Rep. Lente: It's such a blessing here. I'm calling in from Sandia Pueblo, where we probably got about a good nine inches here.

Balok: We comfortably got six inches here. That's a big storm for the greater Roswell area, so we're pleased with that. So, Representative, I would recommend that we just get started and allow you about five minutes, más o menos, to discuss an overview of your views on New Mexico water policy, some aspects that are near and dear to you, and some of the issues that you think will need to be addressed. Then, I hoped to move into a conversation about some specifics. I'd love to hear your thoughts on those. If you want to kick us off and get us started, that would be great.

Rep. Lente: Okay, I'd love to. Thank you for the opportunity to join all of you this afternoon. Once again, I am joining you from my home here on the Sandia Pueblo, which is a little bit north of Albuquerque, where just the past couple of days we received about nine inches of snow, which is an absolute blessing as parched as we've been for the past couple of months.

A little background on myself: I am from both the Sandia Pueblo and the Isleta Pueblo. I have families in both pueblos, and I come from an agricultural family. My father and my mother come from a large agricultural background, and I grew up with my father on the Isleta Pueblo, farming and ranching with him. I now make my home in Sandia Pueblo with my family, where I farm and ranch on a larger scale. My background, with respect to water, is that in the late 1990s to the early 2000s, I worked for Sandia Pueblo as a water resources technician, where I measured using piezometers, and I learned more about the technical aspects of water usage, water quality, surface water, groundwater, and all those other things that come along with the territory. From that experience, I was able to apply those different aspects to my own agricultural practice and how it could better serve my community and me. I also went to law school and learned a little bit more about water law. In the late 2000s, I won a seat on the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District board of directors, representing Sandoval County. While on that board, I spent 10 years—8 of those years as their chairperson—really learning about developing policies related to agriculture and water delivery, flood control, drainage, the whole gamut in regard to agricultural, recreational, and major species matters, in the middle Rio Grande valley of New Mexico, which is basically from Cochiti Lake all the way down a little bit past Socorro to the Bosque del Apache refuge.

Springboarding from that, I ran for a seat in the New Mexico House of Representatives, where I am still a member running for a third term, now serving as the chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture and Water Resources. From those beginnings, I am now in that position, and I have a deep appreciation for water as it relates to our state. I know we are in either a feast-or-famine situation here. I am out on the farm daily with my own operation, so I respect the water from practical usage and agriculture. I can say this loud and proud: water is the lifeblood of our state. I can say without any hesitation that I will work and do whatever I can to protect and promote our water resources so that our future generations have access to the same luxury we have as New Mexicans.

Balok: Representative Stansbury, could you introduce yourself and give us an overview of where you're coming from with relation to New Mexico water policy? Then we will discuss New Mexico's prior appropriation doctrine.

Rep. Stansbury: Thank you, and thank you so much, commissioner. It's wonderful to see you all and to be able to join today. I am Melanie Stansbury, and I represent a state house district and Albuquerque on the east side of town, right here in the foothills. I'm looking at the snow melting out my window. My professional background is working on water issues. I cut my teeth in water during graduate school, studying the Aamodt case in the Pojoaque Valley of northern New Mexico. I went to Washington, D.C., to work as a policy and budget analyst for the Office of Management and Budget in the White House. I worked a lot on water conservation and climate issues there. Then I worked as the water policy person on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, which was chaired by Senators Domenici and Bingaman for many years. I moved back to New Mexico in 2017. I stepped up and ran for office, and now I'm a state legislator.

One of the things I've tried to do since serving in our statehouse is understand the opportunities to modernize New Mexico's water management. During my almost seven years working in Washington, D.C., I had the opportunity to work with states across the West, especially while on the Hill. My portfolio included the Bureau of Reclamation, the U.S. Geological Survey, and all the western water issues, including drought and irrigation systems. The thing that I was really struck by, especially on my return back home to my own community and working with many of you, was how much New Mexico has such a strong culture of water, a love for water, an understanding that water is life, water is culture, and water is key to the future of our communities. Yet, we have not been able to modernize all our systems to manage water with the precision needed. There are a lot of structural problems that stand in the way of doing that, including our water code, adopted in 1912, which was kind of a boilerplate water code in many ways. It has been modified

over the years to recognize many of our traditional systems, but frankly, it isn't serving us very well right now, especially as we're seeing severe drought this year and hydrologic changes. Overall, we're experiencing the need to upgrade all of our infrastructure to manage and meet our water requirements. Over the last two years, I've been holding listening sessions across the state with different stakeholders—everybody from the agricultural community to acequia mayordomos, from oil and gas representatives to water experts, lawyers, and others. I have been asking the question, “If you had a blank slate, if you could fix all the many challenges that we face in water, what would you do?” These sessions give people space to imagine and develop big ideas about what we would do if we could modernize our water systems. I learned a lot from these listening sessions. We had sessions in Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Socorro, and Las Cruces, and planned to hold them around the state this year, but the pandemic stopped us from doing things in person.

The three big takeaways I got from those listening sessions, which included hundreds of people, were: first, everyone—no matter where you live, no matter what your political ideology is, no matter what sector you work in—agrees that the system is not working well right now. We need to improve our governance structures, strengthen how our state interacts with all our water managers and sectors, and upgrade how we do business around water. We really need to fundamentally take a hard look at our water code and reboot it. The second thing I was surprised to learn is that everyone agreed we needed to do some challenging work on our water laws, because there is a keen sense that we know they are broken, but we cannot do better. I want to dispel that myth because we can do better. We have seen in other sectors here in New Mexico that we can implement comprehensive reform. For example, in criminal justice reform, we had a bipartisan commission that worked for over a decade and helped to pass a slew of bills to modernize our criminal code. Finally, our infrastructure is in the worst shape in the United States. We're rated at the bottom in terms of safety and need for maintenance, so we really need to figure out a comprehensive plan of how we're going to resiliently rebuild our infrastructure, and how we're going to accomplish it within the current hydrological regime that we're living in, since we are seeing the actual impacts. Thankfully, the snow is bringing us some moisture right now, but we are seeing the impacts of hydrologic change. If we want our communities to succeed, we need a real, serious, science-based plan for how to rebuild our water infrastructure in this state. Those are some of the big topical areas that we're working on.

I have a monthly work group that has been meeting to talk about the specifics, such as “How do we do this? How do we help communities?” I want to invite any of

you to participate. I know I occupied more real-estate time during this call than Aron wanted me to, but I will stop talking, and you all can return to the discussion of prior appropriation. I will just say that I do not think it is realistic to expect that we can dismantle prior appropriation at this time, but I do think we can build more resilient governance structures focused on water sharing.

Balok: Thank you for that. I think you set the table for our conversation moving forward. Anybody who has worked in the industry for very long becomes familiar with the complexities of prior appropriation. We've had this system in place since before New Mexico was a state. I hear a lot of discussion about wanting to make major changes to move away from the prior appropriation doctrine. Of course, I have a very biased opinion on it. Here in the Pecos Valley, I think we're a little bit ahead of the curve as far as our water administration is concerned because the vast majority of the basin has already been adjudicated, which is a huge obstacle to applying the prior appropriation doctrine. Even so, I still am not a fan of abandoning the prior appropriation doctrine. One of the reasons I'm an advocate for it is because it is such a thorough system, and it contemplates a lot of different scenarios. A lot of times, we find ourselves asking, “How are we going to address this particular shortfall situation?” when the prior appropriation doctrine already tells us what happens.

It's important to point out that here in the Pecos Valley, the Pecos Valley Artesian Conservancy District sits upstream with a junior water right to downstream senior water rights holders. It would make sense for me to advocate doing away with the prior appropriation doctrine—my constituents would stand to benefit from that—but I don't. I think prior appropriation motivates water users to come up with alternative solutions if they don't want to curtail. I would like to ask Representative Lente to weigh in on the prior appropriation doctrine, and then I would like to direct the conversation based on the things that Representative Stansbury said and get to the heart of some of the questions that I have as it relates to water policy. So, Representative Lente.

Rep. Lente: Thank you, Aron. Representative Stansbury, it is good to see you. A little flashback to the past is that I met Representative Stansbury when she was working on the Hill. She was helpful with many of the measures the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District was trying to take then. It was incredible that of all the people in Washington, D.C., the person we would go to see all the time to help us out on these important water issues was the woman from the North Valley of Albuquerque. It's good to have her on the team and helping us with these issues.

When I think about prior appropriation, it obviously depends on where you are on the system. That's going to decide how you feel about it. When I think about the

district I represent here in north-central and northwestern New Mexico, in an adjudicated area along the Rio Grande, many of the tribes rely on the prior appropriation doctrine to ensure they get their full drink of water, especially during times of crisis or climate change. I have seen where this federally protected water right has come into play and has helped protect tribal farmers, for instance, from going dry. When discussing the oldest water users along many of the systems in our state, the prior appropriation doctrine can, in certain cases, be applied to help protect and promote water for agricultural uses, but I have also seen it diminish and become very competitive as it relates to the interests of endangered species, recreation, and so on. In my former terms as a director for the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District and in my work alongside the pueblos in the Six Middle Rio Grande Pueblos Water Coalition, I tried to promote and protect the prior appropriations doctrine. Having this doctrine protect the pueblos' water use was extremely important, and oftentimes it was a stretch to even implement it. To your point, Aron, and Representative, that has been my experience, and that is my take on prior appropriations.

Balok: Representative Stansbury.

Rep. Stansbury: I was just going to add one thing, based on a comment that was just posted in the Q&A about why we would hold on to prior appropriation. One thing that I would see is that oftentimes, when we talk about prior appropriation in New Mexico, we talk about it in a very binary way, either as good or as bad, rather than thinking of it as a tool for figuring out how to distribute water. There are also other systems and forms of distributing water that exist in the same space here in New Mexico. For example, we have pueblos that have been using water for centuries, millennia even. We have Spanish communities that have been using water for centuries, that use different forms of allocation within their own systems and then within the larger macrosystem. What we have seen in other states, like Washington state and, increasingly, in places like Montana, is that at the watershed level, people are coming up with innovative, collaborative water-sharing agreements. Prior appropriation is just one way to determine who should get water, especially in a water-scarce situation. You can have prior appropriation exist in a collaborative watershed agreement. For example, you can have an agreement that the pueblos, because of prior appropriation and their time immemorial water rights, get their water first. They may be willing—I'm not presupposing this—to share water in a time of shortage, or similarly, the acequias might be willing to share water for certain purposes if an agreement is reached. There are other benefits that come with them, like keeping the river wet and so on. One of the things I would really like to challenge our water community to do is to think outside the box, because I really think we tend

to be very constrained in our box here in New Mexico, when there are so many creative ways we can solve water problems through collaborative agreements. You don't have to get rid of every aspect of our law in order to do that.

Balok: Representative, I think you bring up a good point. I kind of keyed in on your hand gesture there because of the blinders that we tend to put on when we discuss prior appropriation. Too many people perceive prior appropriation as a strict winners-and-losers kind of scenario, where senior appropriators get all the diversion while juniors get none. While technically that is probably the way the law reads, the reason I think it is so valuable to New Mexico is because it offers a bleak alternative. If we can't figure out how to come up with some of these agreements you were discussing, the hypothetical ones, that's the alternative. A junior user is going to have to do something to convince a senior user to let him continue using his water with that junior right. This opens the door, and I hate to be the one to say it out loud because Active Water Rights Management (AWRM) has such a terrible reputation among some people, but I really think a big part of what AWRM was intended to do was not to replace prior appropriation doctrine but to serve as an avenue to fulfill its requirements.

One of the problems I have with New Mexico is that it does not put in the hard work prior appropriation requires. A big part of that is the adjudication. I'm certainly not in favor of streamlining it, because if you do, you're going to have to make some sacrifices. I think the one thing that makes adjudication so time-consuming and expensive is that it is thorough. We're not jeopardizing the property rights that someone has invested in. Oftentimes, it's multigenerational. I once heard a quote that says something to the effect that 'quick and easy' is the kind of solution you want for baking a cake, not for big issues like the ones we're discussing. I wouldn't be a big advocate of taking away some of the securities that provide water rights owners with adjudication and protection under the prior appropriation system.

I would like to follow up with a question concerning your comments. Representative Stansbury, you said everyone agrees it is not working. I think it is probably more regional than statewide, and possibly even more a perception than a reality, but I'd love to hear your thoughts, and then we'll move back to Representative Lente.

Rep. Stansbury: In the four places that we went—and, of course, all of those were on the Rio Grande—that was the unanimous sentiment. It was not regional, but it was regional in the sense that those are the places where I held listening sessions. The answer to the question you're asking lies in a response I'd like to say to your earlier comments about prior appropriation.

I disagree with the idea that the state hasn't worked hard to adjudicate our stream systems. The reason why we have large numbers of stream systems that are not adjudicated is because it's not the right tool to solve our problems in some of the places where it has been tried to be used. In terms of the prior appropriation system, you have to think of it historically, right? It came to be in the late nineteenth century, as part of western expansion, to open up especially arid lands to settlement and commercial agricultural development. In places, for example, in the southern Pecos River, where that kind of homesteading and dryland development was happening, it made sense to figure out who should be able to use the water rights first. First in time, first in right; however, when you try to mash that up with thousands of years of occupation of these landscapes and stream systems, including other cultural ways of interacting with these rivers, other legal systems that were indigenous, came from Spain, or were embedded in Mexican law and later assimilated into U.S. law, the systems don't mash up in a nice, coherent manner. If you look, for example, at the history of adjudication, there were adjudications that were filed in the 1960s, and those cases are still not resolved today because the American legal system couldn't figure out what was a fair way for communities to share water. I fundamentally disagree that prior appropriation will solve our problems if we could just figure it out, because we have more than half a century of experience that shows it doesn't solve the problem. That is why, as a state and as a country, we have steadily moved toward collaborative water-sharing agreements. Increasingly, tribes have been willing to come to the table and work with states and the federal government to develop third solutions, such as settlements and related agreements. We value figuring out how we share water together, moving forward, having prosperity, and protecting our communities. It may work in some places, but I don't think it works for a lot of places.

With respect to the comment I made about people wishing for change, I'm sorry I made such a blanket statement. I have a whole list of things that we heard across the state that people would like to see changed in state law. First, our communities are struggling to build drinking water and wastewater systems, and the technical assistance and resources they're receiving for that are inadequate. We need to restructure how we finance, plan and build infrastructure, and provide technical assistance to communities. Second, we need a science and infrastructure plan for the State of New Mexico, and we need to prioritize how we fund assets to ensure we're funding what needs to be built. People are very frustrated working with the state agencies. State agencies are understaffed. They're difficult to navigate. Their IT systems are antiquated. They need to be upgraded, and we need to figure out how to streamline our state programs.

There's a whole slew of things that people across the state feel like we really need to work on. That's more what I was referring to. Representative Lente, do you have thoughts on that comment?

Rep. Lente: I respect much of what Representative Stansbury talks about in terms of her perspective. Coming from a tribal perspective and representing a lot of Native American New Mexico that is unadjudicated along the Rio Grande, back in the late 1990s, early 2000s, I would be asked to go and sit in on meetings regarding water policy, water development, water planning for the future, adjudication discussions, etc. Preparing for those meetings, as a late teenager, I always thought adjudication, at least here at home, was imminent; that it was going to happen within the next 5 to 10 years. Here we are, 20, 25 years later, and nothing yet. Where I'm going with this is that the discussions I recall being part of and listening in to were always led by folks who wanted the best and have, without a doubt, the best in mind and in heart for New Mexico and for the scarce resource that is water. For many of the folks who were speaking up on behalf of that love, they had no skin in the game, so to speak, meaning that they were speaking out of a willingness to want to say, "Well, the pueblo should and the acequia should..." and so-and-so should do this, and share and share. All the while, the pueblos and the acequias, for the most part, were sitting on the sidelines, just listening in. I know dynamics have changed enough that there's more discussion, and I know that for many of the folks who are first in time, first in right, have much more capacity now to join those discussions and be a part of that table. Nonetheless, it just seems to me that we have to make sure that when we're talking about prior appropriations, we have those people who have the most senior water rights at the table and that they are a part of the discussion, if not leading the discussions, in terms of how they are going to be asked to share in the solution.

Balok: I agree 100 percent. As both of you are speaking, I'm contemplating some of the nuances of water. It is complicated and is not just a property right; it is also a public good, and that's really difficult to (a) get your head around and (b) balance, because there are owners that do own a property right in the form of a water right, and none of us can do without water, period. Our current system recognizes, to some extent, that when you take water and use it, you have the right to do so, but then it is returned to the public. It does complicate the issue.

I know we could spend the rest of the day just speaking about water law. Of course, it is the topic of our discussion, but I want to transition just a bit to another topic with roots here in the Pecos Valley. We use the term "conjunctive management." It is this notion that we have to manage groundwater because it is connected to the stream, and what you do to one affects the other. Just

a little factoid for the day: that concept of conjunctive management was born here in the Pecos Valley. It was used as justification to give the State Engineer authority to manage groundwater. It was intended to apply to limited parts of the state, but the way it was worded means that, when we have a deeper understanding of the resource, the State Engineer has the authority to manage it. As we have moved forward with this conjunctive management concept—19 western states have adopted the model New Mexico uses for conjunctive management—we have gone through some real growing pains over here in the Pecos Valley and have gotten in trouble with the State of Texas for underdelivery. That's what they pointed to as the cause for the underdelivery on the Pecos: groundwater pumping. Now we're seeing a similar situation play out on the lower Rio Grande, again with the State of Texas.

I would like to hear your thoughts, and we'll start with you, Representative Stansbury. What do you see as an opportunity to better manage or possibly to change policies to manage our groundwater? Remember that, unlike in the Pecos Valley, groundwater in many of these areas is fossil water. They're mining water; it is a finite resource.

Rep. Stansbury: I think we need two things. I think we need better science and a comprehensive groundwater policy for the state. First of all, a huge percentage of our state's aquifers and groundwater are not well understood. It's hard to manage something you don't understand well, especially the hydrologic connectivity between surface water and groundwater. I would like to see the state and federal government make a sustained investment and really try to understand that hydrology. Second, I don't know what it would look like in terms of a comprehensive groundwater policy, but a number of other states have moved in that direction, including California, which passed the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act a couple of years ago to help facilitate and improve the way that groundwater is managed. We should look at what different states are experimenting with and figure out how we can improve conjoined management, because it's just one water and we've got to manage it well.

Balok: Representative Lente.

Rep. Lente: Aron, if I may, I agree 100 percent with the sentiments of Representative Stansbury. Those two things are extremely important, but I know the State Engineer is in the meeting and that we've had really frank and honest discussions about his department's lack of a strong budget. We can't do much in this state if we can't even fund our own State Engineer's office appropriately. It is incumbent upon folks like Representative Stansbury and me to really step up to the plate and fight on behalf of departments like Mr. D'Antonio's, because those are the departments that will make these things happen and really help us help ourselves. If we continue to kick the can down the road, unfortunately, we'll just keep creating battles between

folks along certain river areas and also just before us, with the tough decisions about what Mother Nature has given us.

Balok: I certainly appreciate that. I've got something of a parting shot for both of you. You can address it if you'd like in your closing comments. One of the things we see here in the Pecos Valley is the financial value of water and how it impacts our efforts to manage it. A good example of that are wells used for construction. They're filing permits to divert water from domestic or livestock wells. They can divert three acre-feet from that and then file for two more extensions and take a total of nine acre-feet from oil that doesn't have a water right associated with it, which, in and of itself, is a good idea. You must have a water source in these areas where you're doing construction projects and gas and oil development. That really shines a spotlight on some of the solutions we discuss for our future water needs.

We just heard a discussion on desalinization, and there has been a lot of discussion about how we can use produced water from the oil field to meet some of those needs. I did just some quick math here. I'm sure you all know that there are 44 gallons to a barrel. That's 7,405 barrels in an acre-foot. Over here, right now, water is selling anywhere from 50 to 75 cents per barrel. That equates to a range between 3,700 and 5,500 dollars per acre-foot. That's expensive water. When you're talking about a rate of one dollar a barrel to clean up water to the point where we can use it for fracking, it really becomes difficult to see how our producers are going to lean toward produced water instead of buying fresh water and using it for that. If you all would like to include that in your closing comments, Representative Lente, I would ask that you go first and wrap things up. I certainly appreciate you taking the time to be here with us.

Rep. Lente: Aron, folks, and Representative Stansbury, it's an honor and a pleasure to join all of you this afternoon. I know this is a minimal amount of time we can apply to this type of situation and this discussion, but there is more conversation to be had. As it relates to the legislature and the work we're doing there, most folks can rest assured that we are in full support of departments like our State Engineer and other folks to make sure that they are fully staffed and that their budgets are adequate. Obviously, we're not there yet, but we are looking forward to getting there. If we don't plan adequately today for water resources in the State of New Mexico—again, it's a feast-or-famine situation—we're going to continue to kick the can down the road, as discussed previously. If we can prioritize our ability to begin those discussions and bring the important parties to the table when we're making these plans, that's going to help the planning process immensely. I am aware of discussions of prior appropriations and other emerging concepts, and I grant that many of the

systems in our state are, in fact, old and dilapidated. We have a lot of work to do, and our state's failure, in terms of water planning and water investments for infrastructure, is expensive. The fact is, we have to do something about it because water is becoming increasingly scarce. To that point, Aron and folks on the call, I appreciate the opportunity to join all of you this afternoon.

Balok: Representative Stansbury.

Rep. Stansbury: Thank you, Aron, and thank you also for this great conversation. I love these conversations. I think produced water generates a lot of heated discussion. To me, produced water is a chemistry and an economics question. At the end of the day, can you clean that water at a cheap enough and fast enough rate to make it reusable, certainly in the oil field, which we should be doing, and then make it safe enough for consumption uses? There are still some question marks around how it is regulated, how we desalinate it, all these things, and whether, near term, there is technology that makes it economical. There's already a research consortium of New Mexico's greatest minds at New Mexico State University and around the state, probably including many of you on this call, working on those technical questions. There's no doubt in my mind that if anyone can figure out those technical questions, it's the scientists of New Mexico's universities and national labs. I hate to opine on a technical matter before we hear from our technical experts.

In summary, I just want to repeat and say thank you to Chairman Lente. I really appreciate everything he said and agree with it wholeheartedly. We need to invest in it as a

state and support our state agencies that manage water. We need to work on modernizing everything we do in this state, including investing in infrastructure and streamlining processes, all to care for our most precious resource, which is water, and which is life. I look forward to working with all of you. If you have any questions or follow-ups, please feel free to be in touch. Thank you.

Balok: I've been seeing all these questions pop up, and I wish I could go through and answer all of them. I love the fact that it has generated some thoughts. As an instructor once told me, at least we're getting some neurons to fire there, and people are thinking about this. I think Representative Stansbury hit the nail on the head that there's a ton of technical work that we still need to do. We rely heavily on models, but they are only as good as the information we put into them. That's why so many people love to cuss the models that we use. Yes, they're inaccurate, and they don't do all the things we'd love them to do, but that's because we can only make them as good as the information we put in. There are a lot of data gaps there.

I want to thank both of you for taking the time to visit with us. Hopefully, we got people thinking about the realities and complications of addressing our New Mexico water policy. Thank you to the audience for participating and listening to us.