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| **For Immediate Release:** | **Contact:** Neal A. Patel/Michawn Rich |
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**ICYMI: Heller Stresses Importance of Nevada Land Bills** **(Washington, DC)** – Recently, U.S. Senator Dean Heller (R-NV) testified at a Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee hearing on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining regarding two important land bills for the State of Nevada. Both pieces of legislation, the [*Good Samaritan Search and Recovery Act of 2015*](http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=fa46e412-fd82-47d7-9425-e50c3d3e4e58)(S. 160) and the [*Douglas County Conservation Act of 2015*](http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=695d1a2f-97d0-4a41-84a4-63949524d254) (S. 472) are bipartisan and bicameral. The hearing, coupled with Senator Heller’s testimony, mark important steps in the legislative process towards these bills becoming a reality. Click [HERE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7-fK8FyP9A&feature=youtu.be) or on the video below to watch Senator Heller’s testimony. **Testimony as prepared:**Thank you Chairman Barrasso and Ranking Member Wyden for including my bills that seek to address two difficult public lands issues in Nevada in today’s hearing. Prompt action on these types of bills is extremely important to the well-being of western states. As you know, the federal government administers roughly 85 percent of the land in Nevada, the highest percentage of any state in the nation. This presents our local and state governments with many unique challenges. Those communities often work closely with the Congressional delegation to develop bills to improve public land management. Last Congress, I was proud to work with Chairman Murkowski on the public lands package that was ultimately enacted as part of the National Defense Authorization Act. The eight Nevada bills included in that package were the culmination of nearly a decade of work on public lands bills. I appreciate the Chairman’s leadership on these issues, and I hope my two bills before us today will be the next of these public lands successes. The Douglas County Conservation Act is grassroots-driven proposal that balances the need to spur economic development while preserving our state’s western character. In 2009, Douglas County embarked on a long process to develop legislation that adjusts federal land ownership and management throughout the county. Over the course of six years, they performed outreach activities, held a series of community open houses, and obtained the input of stakeholder groups and several hundred community members. Ultimately, the Board of Commissioners unanimously approved framework of a bill and requested that Congress move forward. As a result, Representative Amodei, Senator Reid, and I introduced the bill in February with the support of our entire Congressional Delegation. The final product jump-starts economic development throughout Douglas County while ensuring the rural character of the Carson Valley remains intact. Specifically, it conveys lands to local governments and the Washoe Tribe for important public works projects. Additionally, it would promote conservation of riparian and bi-state sage-grouse habitat along the Carson River and improve recreation opportunities. I want to particularly underscore conveyances of flood control management areas and important water resources infrastructure parcels to Douglas County, which are critical to the long-term economic competitiveness of the region. Four flash floods events that occurred in July and August of 2014 ravaged the region, causing nearly a million dollars’ worth of damage throughout the area. The county has started construction on two projects to reduce flood risks and conducted additional studies to identify additional flood risk. Whereas out east, local government can acquire land on their own to build public works projects; out west we unfortunately have to get Congress’ permission. These conveyances are critical to the county’s long-term flood control and transportation planning efforts. This bill was developed from the bottom up, not the top down; the way public lands bills should be written. As a result, it has garnered near unanimous local support ranging from the Washoe Tribe to the local towns and general improvement districts. My second bill, the Good Samaritan Search and Recovery Act, would solve a long-standing public safety issue in Federal Lands. My friend, Congressman Joe Heck, and I first introduced this legislation in 2013 in response to the tragic stories of Mr. Keith Goldberg and Air Force Staff Sargent Antonio Tucker. Both of these individuals were missing for over a year before volunteer Good Samaritan rescue teams received government authorization to begin searching. Keith Goldberg, a Las Vegas taxi cab driver, disappeared on January 31, 2012. He was believed to be the victim of murder, but the police were unable to find his remains in the Las Vegas desert. When new evidence pointed towards the Lake Mead Recreational Area, the Goldberg family reached out to a private search and rescue team to look for Keith. All that prevented the rescue team from discovering the body was the bureaucratic red tape of the Park Service, which refused to allow them to search the area without a permit and a $1 million insurance policy. After the family spent six months finding an insurer and raising the money to buy the policy, Keith’s body was found within two hours.Similarly, Staff Sergeant Antonio Tucker’s family suffered a similarly frustrating ordeal. Staff Sergeant Tucker was stationed at Creech Air Force Base, when he went missing on June 23, 2012. He was believed drowned. Like the situation with Keith Goldberg, a search team offered to look for Staff Sergeant Tucker but was blocked by the Department of the Interior. When the team finally got authorization to search around a year later, they found the body within two days.No more families should have to go through what the Goldberg and Tucker families had to endure. This bipartisan common-sense legislation that expedites access to public lands for search and recovery organizations has been thoroughly vetted in Congress. It has had multiple hearings between the House and Senate, garnering no significant opposition. Last month, it passed the House by a vote of 413-0. I am confident it can garner similar overwhelming support in the Senate. Let’s get it done. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to working together to move these bipartisan proposals through the Committee, and ultimately through the full U.S. Senate. ###http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/vendor/_skins/heller/images/newsletter/icon_fb.png http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/vendor/_skins/heller/images/newsletter/icon_tw.png http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/vendor/_skins/heller/images/newsletter/icon_yt.png |
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