

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 27, 2009

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

First, let us congratulate you on your appointment as Secretary of Interior. We look forward to working with you in a collaborative fashion as we strive to help sustain and improve western and rural communities while producing long-term benefits to America's federal lands.

One area we believe merits the immediate attention of both Congress and the Administration is that of improving electric transmission capacity in the West. As the Administration moves forward with its ambitious objective to build several thousand miles of new transmission lines, we respectfully request that you work to build off the knowledge base and careful coordination already achieved by the western states we represent.

We commend President Obama for recognizing early in his campaign the challenges our current electric transmission system pose toward energy conservation and increased, efficient use of America's diverse energy resource portfolio – particularly renewable energy resources. These challenges are well documented. In its November 10, 2008 report on *Reliability Impacts of Climate Change Initiatives*, the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) underscored the obstacles of overlaying new electric power from renewable resources on the existing transmission grid. Specifically, the report stated that “existing transmission infrastructure is inadequate to reliably integrate new renewable resources to demand centers.” As the report further states, “areas that are rich in renewables ... do not correspond with areas where the transmission system is the strongest.”


Western policymakers are well aware that our best opportunities for renewable generation exist in location-constrained areas. Currently, the transmission infrastructure simply doesn't exist to get these resources – namely wind, solar, and geothermal power – to market. The financial, manpower and regulatory investment to do so will be steep. If the administration is serious about tapping these currently underutilized western resources in any significant way, it will be best served by partnering with our state leaders to determine a coordinated path forward.

In a January 27, 2009 letter to House and Senate Leadership, the Western Governors' Association (WGA) outlined one of the most important ways in which the federal government can assist states in their effort to bring new renewable power online: by helping to ensure new transmission lines are "adequately sized to meet long-term needs." Successfully harnessing the full potential of our renewable resources will not happen overnight. Interest and investment in new renewable projects will depend largely on the ability to deliver that energy to consumers. Due to design, cost, and reliability constraints, however, it is often cost prohibitive, if not impossible, to "upsized" a major long-distance transmission line once it has already gone into service. By working with states in a proactive manner, the federal government can prepare for future increased power transfer capability as new lines are being constructed. As the WGA letter signals, state regulatory agencies do not have the tools to accomplish this particular capacity issue alone. Specifically how the federal government should assist in this effort will continue to be an issue of active debate.


Finally, we would appreciate an update from your agency regarding the implementation of the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) new, western state Renewable Energy Coordination Offices, as established by Secretarial Order on January 16, 2009. It is our understanding that these offices, to be located in Arizona, California, Nevada, and Wyoming, will not only work to support the timely processing of renewable energy project applications, but will focus on improving coordination with the various federal agencies involved in the siting and approval of renewable energy projects and associated transmission. We feel such inter-agency coordination is paramount to getting such projects online expeditiously and encourage you to move forward with bringing these proposed offices up to operational status as quickly as possible.

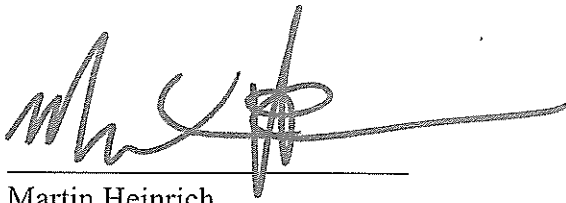
You have recently been quoted in the press as stating that the "Interior Department stood ready to deal with issues of siting and transmission," and that our nation is on the brink of an "energy revolution." The potential for renewable power in the west is clear, but so are the challenges. We look forward to working with you and our respective states to ensure the correct policies are in place to encourage substantial growth in this emerging energy arena, while recognizing the leadership of those state and regional entities that have, to date, driven this effort forward on their own.

Sincerely,


Cynthia M. Lummis
Member of Congress


Walt Minnick
Member of Congress


Rob Bishop
Member of Congress



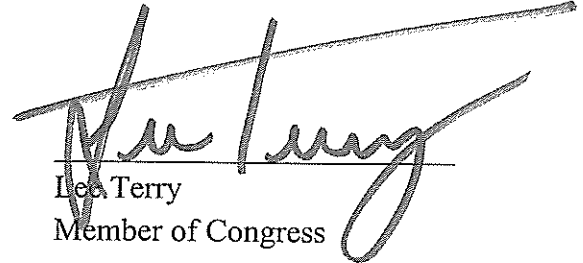
Martin Heinrich
Member of Congress


M.C.

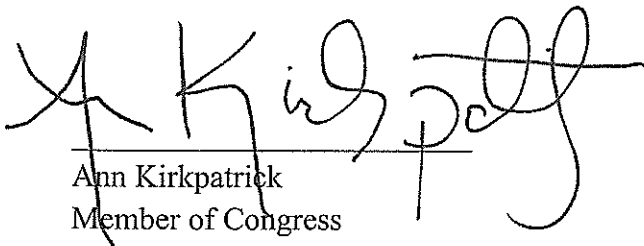
Jason Chaffetz
Member of Congress



Ben Ray Luján
Member of Congress



Leo Terry
Member of Congress



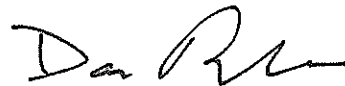
Ann Kirkpatrick
Member of Congress



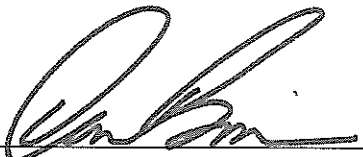
Michael K. Simpson
Member of Congress



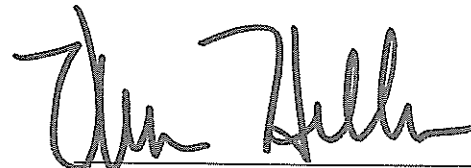
Dina Titus
Member of Congress



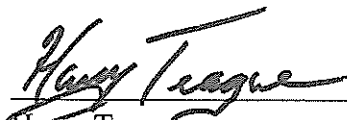
Dana Rohrabacher
Member of Congress



Dan Boren
Member of Congress



Dean Heller
Member of Congress



Harry Teague
Member of Congress



Denny Rehberg
Member of Congress

Cc: Carol M. Browner, Assistant to the President for Energy and Climate Change