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SENATOR BENNET
WESTERN CLIMATE RESILIENCE ROUNDTABLE
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INTRODUCTION

Our environment is our economy in the West. From the agriculture that helps sustain our nation, to the rivers and mountains that bring jobs and business to our state, to the forests that keep clean water flowing to our cities -- our soils, forests, mountains, rangelands, rivers, and watersheds are the foundation on which our way of life depends.

Climate change is a threat to that way of life. We see the negative consequences of climate change throughout the West, in the diminished flow of our rivers, in the increasing incidence of catastrophic wildfires, and in the extreme drought.

We are a group of leaders who are connected to the Colorado River Basin. We came together to respond to the issues we are seeing on the ground and to identify the areas where we can work together to make our western communities and economies more resilient in the face of a changing climate. We have outlined those areas below.

While we do not intend for this document to serve as a comprehensive approach to climate change, we believe that our way of life depends on our coming together on a durable climate strategy that allows us to mount a sustained response to the challenges we face. We believe that that strategy must be built on partnerships with local communities that reflect the geographic and cultural diversity of the West, including, but not limited to, people from the Indigenous, Black, and Latinx communities. We believe that strategy must include both the tools necessary to ensure the resilience of western economies that we outline below, as well as a path to achieve science-based adaptation, mitigation, and management strategies, including but not limited to greenhouse gas emission targets and sustainable water supplies.

Participants in the Bennet Western Climate Resilience Roundtable

Chair: Andy Mueller, *General Manager, Colorado River District*

Participants:
Steve Anderson, *Farmer, Olathe, Manager of Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association*
Steve Beckley, *Owner of Glenwood Canyon Adventure Park and Iron Mountain Hotsprings*
Leland Begay, *Associate General Counsel, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe*
Paul Bruchez, *Rancher, Grand County*
Sonja Chavez, *General Manager, Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District*
Tony Cheng, *Director, Colorado Forest Restoration Institute, CSU*
Tracy Gallegos, *Director, Colorado Migrant Education Program*
Russ George, *Director, Colorado Inter-Basin Compact Committee*
Jon Goldin Dubois, *President, Western Resource Advocates*
Bryan Hannegan, *President and Chief Executive Officer, Holy Cross Energy*
Jonathan Houck, *Gunnison County Commissioner*
Merrit Linke, *Grand County Commissioner*
Jim Lochhead, *CEO, Denver Water*
Becky Mitchell, *Director, Colorado Water Conservation Board*
Kelly Nordini, *Executive Director Conservation Colorado*
Kathy Rall, *Water Resources Division Head, Southern Ute Indian Tribe*
Sarah Shrader, *Owner and Co-Founder, Bonsai Design*
Bruce Talbott, *Orchard/Vineyard Manager, Talbott Mountain Gold*

PRIORITIES, ACTION, AND INVESTMENT

PRIORITY 1:

Our resilience is dependent on strong local economies in the West. Our climate strategy must include tools for local economies in the West to adapt to changing climate and economic conditions and build long-term prosperity in a clean economy future.

ACTIONS

To build climate resilience the federal government must be an effective partner in bolstering strong economies throughout the West, including partnering on sustained economic development efforts for communities transitioning from fossil fuels, developing updated and resilient infrastructure, and integrating next generation technology. Steps to support this priority include:

- **Ignite economic activity in communities transitioning from fossil-fuel based economies, allowing them to adapt in the near term and thrive in the long term through**:
  - Building strong partnerships with local leaders, local businesses, and community members;
  - Directing tax incentives, investments, planning and technical support to businesses and communities affected by energy transitions;
  - Enabling and supporting the construction of high-quality broadband networks that provide access to the global marketplace;
  - Investing in forest restoration, sustainable clean energy, and outdoor recreation, to attract new business, high quality job opportunities, and new tax revenue; and
  - Upskilling and reskilling displaced talent by investing in training specific to job opportunities relevant to their community's future economy.

- **Modernize and build the infrastructure necessary to secure the future of communities responding to the changing conditions posed by climate change in a way that**:
  - Reflects the need to not only repair infrastructure, but to build infrastructure that can last under the additional strain of a changing climate;
  - Builds resilience and prepares infrastructure for simultaneous natural disasters and cascading impacts associated with interconnected sectors and systems;
  - Elevates and helps implement locally driven solutions;
  - Includes new infrastructure, like broadband connectivity and electrical vehicle charging stations, that will enable communities to take advantage of economic opportunities in the future;
  - Prioritizes updating and building climate resilient water infrastructure that protects and enhances rivers and habitat, provides water for our communities and agriculture while enhancing a vibrant outdoor economy; and
  - Ensures a clean and reliable water supply for native communities.

- **Implement policies and incentives at the federal level that help speed widespread deployment and integration of the next generation energy, technology and businesses that will create new jobs and help us achieve the necessary science-based emission targets.**
    - Create and implement emissions targets based on the latest and best science.
    - Design and implement policies and programs to achieve science-based emission targets that incent economic resilience, emissions reductions, and success for communities most impacted by the emissions targets.
    - Include and promote science-based policies and programs which have a proven track record as well as those that are spurred by local innovation.

- **Ensure a strong and active partnership with the federally recognized Indian Tribes, through**:
    - Supporting the Tribes in transition from economic reliance on fossil fuels to clean energy solutions on their lands with efficient and timely review and approvals as required;
    - Supporting the Tribes in their effort to provide quality potable water to their members through the development of water infrastructure; and
    - Prioritizing funding for the rehabilitation of water infrastructure, watersheds, and healthy rivers to provide for successful and sustainable agricultural development.

PRIORITY 2:

Supporting healthy soils, forests, rangeland, rivers, and watersheds will make our communities more resilient and help maximize the climate mitigation potential of western landscapes.

ACTIONS

To build climate resilience we need an updated approach to managing our public and private lands, forests, rangelands, rivers, and watersheds across landownerships and jurisdictions that reflects the challenges that climate change poses to our way of life. A new approach should also maximize the climate mitigation potential of our land, rangelands, forests, and watersheds. Steps to support this priority include:

- **An updated approach to federal management of our natural resources should:**
    - Be informed by the best available science;
    - Elevate proven and innovative collaborative solutions that are prioritized, designed, and driven by those closest to the ground;
    - Provide increased funding to meet the scope of the challenge and eliminate barriers between different government agencies, different levels of government, and the public and private sectors; and
    - Aim to address existing damage, prevent additional damage, and prevent worsening conditions.

- **A strategy to maximize the climate mitigation value of western landscapes, including:**

- Investment in healthy forests and rangelands, sustainable water supplies, and the restoration of degraded landscapes;
- Prioritization through investment and creation of policies, partnerships, innovation, and incentives for working lands that increase carbon storage, advance water conservation, and lead to healthier soil and greater biodiversity;
- Facilitation and formation of public-private partnerships to secure the health and future of our rivers and watersheds; and
- Create and implement carbon sink targets using the best available science.

PRIORITY 3:

Our climate resilience is dependent on a thorough and science-based understanding of actions needed to sustainably adapt to and mitigate climate change.

ACTIONS

We must work together to prioritize research, development, and rapid adoption of new tools and best management practices while also building understanding through expanded outreach and education about climate change and resilience. Steps to support this priority include:

- **Fully fund research to advance scientific knowledge of climate variability and change in a way that informs and enables timely decisions on climate adaptation and mitigation. Build sustained, practically oriented assessment capacity at national, regional and local levels to improve our ability to understand, anticipate and respond to climate change impacts and vulnerabilities. These efforts should include**:
    - Continuous and sustained high-quality monitoring and measurement of key earth system parameters including but not limited to temperature, rainfall, air quality, land cover, streamflow and other important physical, chemical or biological quantities;
    - Improvements in climate models that leverage advances in supercomputing to deliver higher-resolution projections of future climate change and its impacts through decision support tools that are accessible to a broad community of users and decision makers;
    - Decision support tools and resources for local public and private sector entities that facilitate the use of climate science for planning and building resilience in important economic sectors, including but not limited to energy, water, agriculture, transportation, recreation, housing and other important climate-sensitive industries and activities;
    - Expand and sustain on-the-ground human resources (like the Regionally Integrated Science and Assessment (RISA) program); and
    - Increase funding for research and development programs throughout the West that focus on developing climate change solutions (NGOs, national labs, universities, businesses).

- **Invest in educating our communities and the next generation on the changes we expect to the environment and the economy, and invest in the tools that will help us be more resilient. These efforts should include:**
    - Developing and improving scientifically based professional development for educators;
    - Creating and developing formal partnerships between climate experts, educational and research institutions, state, federal, and tribal governments, federal labs, non-profits, and the main decision makers in our local communities;
    - Providing the resources to make the information accessible to everyone; and
    - Create and provide opportunities to open education and access to the outdoors for historically disadvantaged persons and disadvantaged communities especially those who are or will experience disproportionate impacts from climate change.

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