



Nomination of Senator Salazar Applauded by Family Farm Alliance President

Wyoming Rancher Stresses Opportunity to Balance Environment, Economy

(Klamath Falls, Oregon – Dec. 17, 2008). Family Farm Alliance (Alliance) President Patrick O’Toole, a sheep and cattle rancher from Wyoming, earlier today voiced support for President-elect Barack Obama’s nomination of Senator Ken Salazar to be the next Secretary of the Interior. O’Toole used the occasion to introduce an important water policy paper that the Alliance hopes can be used by the incoming Obama Administration to develop solutions to Western water problems that balance environmental demands with economic realities.

“For 20 years, the Alliance has focused on ensuring the availability of reliable, affordable irrigation water supplies to Western farmers and ranchers,” said O’Toole. “Farming and ranching is hard work, and it will take more hard work to solve some of the most contentious issues in the West. Ken Salazar would be an Interior Secretary we can work with to develop bipartisan solutions to the water challenges facing Western rural communities.”

O’Toole points to Senator Salazar’s understanding of Western rural issues and his proven track record of developing practical solutions to complicated problems. For example, earlier this year, President Bush signed a measure sponsored by Senator Salazar, called the “More Water, More Energy, Less Waste Act of 2007”. That bipartisan bill could lead to the clean-up and usability of significant volumes of groundwater brought to the surface during oil and gas drilling or coal bed methane extraction. This water could then be used for irrigation and other purposes.

Alliance members also recognize that Senator Salazar’s family have farmed and ranched the same Colorado land for five generations.

“We know he will have a special appreciation for the challenges facing Western family farmers and ranchers,” said O’Toole.

Two top environmental challenges that will likely receive priority attention from the Obama Administration are water infrastructure needs and climate change. The infrastructure issue is dealt with at length in the new Alliance report, “Western Water Policy: The Challenges and Opportunities of our Times – Our Legacy for the Next Generation”. The Alliance in 2007 released another report that provided the perspective of Western irrigators on climate change.

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PDF versions of both reports can be downloaded at the Family Farm Alliance website: www.familyfarmalliance.org.

The water needed to meet growing urban, power, and environmental demands in the West is being siphoned off from agriculture, undermining rural farming communities and the nation's food security. The Alliance will call upon the Obama Administration to help develop a more rational strategy that will combine water conservation and development of new supplies to meet the needs of the growing West without destroying its agriculture base.

“We believe society will reject an approach which leads to shuttering farming communities to meet urban growth, recreational demands and environmental requirements,” said O’Toole. “Our nation needs a stable domestic food supply, just as it needs a stable energy supply.”

“We are hopeful that Senator Salazar will apply his balanced approach and join us to develop creative water solutions that protect rural economies and communities as well as fish and wildlife,” said Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen. “We know this can be done without taking scarce water resources away from existing water users.”

Keppen said Alliance members look forward to an Interior Department that engages in objective, transparent and thoughtful decision making, based on a thorough examination of all the relevant science and policy considerations. Earlier this week, the Alliance [filed a request](#) under the federal Information Quality Act to ensure that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – an Interior agency – corrects erroneous information included in an issue ordered by the Service on Monday that is estimated to cut California’s dwindling water supply by a third or more.

“We hope that Senator Salazar will manage Interior with a similar concern for sound science and transparency,” said Keppen, who appeared on National Public Radio’s *All Things Considered* yesterday and commented on the latest selection made by the Obama transition team.

“With his choice of Ken Salazar for Interior Secretary, President-elect Obama is sending a tremendously positive message of understanding about the problems faced by people living in the West,” said O’Toole. “His commitment to balancing environmental demands and economic realities inspires our confidence in this new administration.”

The Family Farm Alliance is a grassroots organization of family farmers, ranchers, irrigation districts and allied industries in 16 Western states. The Alliance is focused on one mission: To ensure the availability of reliable, affordable irrigation water supplies to Western farmers and ranchers. Since 2005, the Family Farm Alliance has been invited to testify 16 times before Congress on water and environmental challenges and legislation. For more information on the Alliance, go to www.familyfarmalliance.org

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