

## **Norton and Keys Leave a Legacy for the West**

By Dan Keppen

Irrigated agriculture saw the departure of two great friends from the halls of the Department of Interior earlier this year. Gale Norton, Secretary of the Interior, and John W. Keys III, Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation (an Interior agency) in March announced that they would be leaving Washington, D.C. after working for more than five years in the Bush Administration. In their wake, they leave a legacy that provides a successful template for others to follow. Both were advocates of common-sense stewardship, as well as champions of collaboration and science-driven decision-making in the environmental arena.

Gale Norton, 51, is the first woman to serve as the Secretary of the Interior. She has been in office longer than all but six of her predecessors. President Bush has picked Idaho Gov. Dirk Kempthorne as Norton's replacement.

During her tenure, Secretary Norton addressed areas of potential crises and negotiated historic water agreements that will affect millions of Americans for decades to come. Notably, she helped resolve issues in dispute for more than 75 years, when seven states reached agreement with the federal government on a multi-decade agreement for managing the Colorado River.

She also established the Water 2025 program that funded 68 challenge grants to address western water conflicts before crises occur. This latter program has largely been a success story, since it provides seed money for state and local governments to take a leading role in meeting water supply challenges.

Predictably, environmentalists and the papers who serve them took some pots shots at Norton as she headed out the door.

“Despite her cheery demeanor and lip service to the cause of conservation, Norton has worked tirelessly to open public lands to commercial exploitation,” charged the editors of the *Eugene (OREGON) Register-Guard*.

Gale Norton was closer to the roots of true environmental conservationism than most of the talking heads in the so-called mainstream environmental movement and their pals in the media. She understood that you have to work with landowners if you want to actually recover imperiled wildlife, since the large majority of critters listed under the Endangered Species Act use private lands for habitat. She has strongly advocated for new conservation partnerships and the use of practical tools that facilitate cooperative conservation of our nation's lands and waters.

Her reward for employing this type of philosophy?

Vilification by litigious environmental activists and their allies in the media.

Which must mean she did a pretty good job.

John Keys stood at the helm of Reclamation and skillfully managed water issues at a time when drought conditions were some of the worst seen in the history of our country. After serving nearly 40 years with Reclamation, Keys intends to spend time with his family.

I will always appreciate John Keys' solid understanding of Reclamation's customers and the challenges they face. He has always been accessible to the customers, open to their ideas, and dedicated to providing them the best service possible. He is well-respected by Reclamation professionals and customers alike for his in-depth knowledge of the agency and the facilities for which it is responsible.

John Keys' career at Reclamation undoubtedly provided him with the skills to lead an organization noted for its "can-do" approach to problem solving. He understood the original mission of Reclamation, its success, and the challenges it is now facing.

I will remember John Keys for the strong relationships he developed with his co-workers and customers. He was someone who genuinely cared and took a personal interest in water issues and the people affected by Reclamation decisions. In fact, the Family Farm Alliance presented John with an "Award of Excellence" at our Annual Conference in Las Vegas last month, before he announced his resignation.

It was clear that Gale Norton and John Keys cared deeply about the people that they worked for, the land and water they managed, and the people that worked for them. They will be missed.

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