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Testimony presented by:
Thad S. Ballard, Vice President
Wells Chamber of Commerce
Wednesday, April 2, 2003
Committee on Finance
Senate Bill 488

The Wells Chamber of Commerce supports the Metropolis Irrigation District's plans to study and rebuild Bishop Creek Dam.

The Chamber understands that it is a difficult decision for you and your colleagues to approve additional funding during a legislative session where revenues are less than expected and the economy makes raising taxes problematic at best. However, we view Senate Bill 488 as an investment that will eventually produce additional tax revenues through increased local business activity.

In addition to enhanced agricultural production, the Chamber expects local businesses to benefit from residents taking advantage of new recreational opportunities rather than traveling to nearby southern Idaho with their recreation dollars. We hope that the reservoir will also create additional opportunities to draw sportsmen from other areas. The increased traffic will certainly benefit existing grocery stores, motels, recreational vehicle parks, service stations and casinos. Perhaps enough money will be infused into the economy for other business ventures, like sporting goods sales, to begin. The lands have been purchased, plans drawn and venture capital committed for the construction of a fifty-two room hotel with convention facilities and a sixty space recreational vehicle park. The owners are waiting for that one development that will transform their projects from marginal experiments to profitable ventures. We believe that reconstruction of Bishop Creek Dam will provide that critical mass.

The impact of the fourth consecutive drought year has taken its toll on our member businesses. Area ranchers are among the most loyal patrons of our business community. The Chamber believes that the increased water storage capacity will moderate the effects of drought years and that the parts suppliers, building material retailers and other service providers will also benefit.

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The Economic Development Committee of the Chamber has worked long and hard to recruit additional businesses to our community. We are hopeful that some of those contacts will soon bear fruit. Too many business owners have been sold on our area by its strategic location and affordable utilities but their interest has waned when they visit our community only to find limited recreation and support services. We feel that development of Bishop Creek may also be just enough incentive to finally recruit those prospects.

We have experience in using tourism amenities to enhance business development. For nearly two decades, various entities dreamed of redeveloping Old Town Seventh Street, our original commercial district since the late 1840's. Seventh Street died when it was by-passed by Interstate 80. Only two of the eighteen buildings featured in the Historic Walking Tour were fit for occupancy in 1999. Since the initial publication and installation of historical markers, four buildings have been saved from the wrecking ball and occupied with small businesses. Three other building are being remodeled. Lieutenant Governor Loraine Hunt presented the Governors Award for the Best New Tourism Initiative 2001 to The Society for the Preservation of Western Heritage for opening the Trail of the Forty-niner's Interpretive Center. All of these improvements grew from a \$2000 seed planted by the Chamber as a special project of Wells Rural Electric Company. While we recognize that we are asking you to commit considerably more in this project, we expect that investment to be rewarded proportionately.

Through our dealings with the stakeholders of the Metropolis Irrigation District, we know that they have the management skills required to lead the long-term planning and phased construction of this project. The fourth generations of their families are assuming their roles in the community and establishing their families. Such milestones witness their ability to plan for, and create, the future.

We are proud to testify in their support. We believe in their ability to meet the challenges that a project of this scale will surely encounter. We pledge to continue to work with them to make this project a reality. We know they have the support of the agricultural community. They continue to earn the support of sportsmen and outdoor enthusiasts. With your support, we will enjoy both the recreational opportunities and the economic rewards of this proposal.

Thank you for your attention to our perspective. I will be happy to relay your concerns and comments or to answer your questions.