



**Testimony of Mary Beth Sewald  
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Prepared for the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources,  
Subcommittee on Water and Power**

**Hearing on the use of technology and innovation to increase water  
security and enable economic development in the West.  
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I'm Mary Beth Sewald, president and CEO of the Las Vegas Metro Chamber of Commerce. Thank you, Chairman McSally and a special thank you to the Ranking Member, Nevada's own, Senator Cortez Masto, for inviting me before the subcommittee today. I also want to thank Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Manchin of the full committee for having me here.

It is an honor to speak to you on the critically important issue of water and how the Southern Nevada business community, especially through technology and innovation, is playing an invaluable role in ensuring long-term access to water in the West.



The Las Vegas Chamber is the largest business association in Nevada. The Chamber's mission is to promote a strong and diversified economy that will attract new businesses, enable existing businesses to expand, and support a good quality of life. That's why the Las Vegas Chamber is very engaged in water management and conservation in our region.

The Las Vegas metropolitan area is the second fastest growing city in the nation with the best job growth index. Our population is more than 2 million residents and we welcome more than 42 million visitors annually. Since 2011, the Las Vegas Valley has added 10,000 new businesses and 180,000 new jobs.

Sustaining this growth and vibrant economy requires our relentless management of water resources. That's why the Chamber has been an active partner in water issues for decades.

Water security is essential for any city. It is something that cities in the West focus upon every day. We certainly do in Southern Nevada



because the Colorado River is our lifeblood. Though Las Vegas receives only 2 percent of the river's total supply, the Colorado River allocation makes up 90 percent of Las Vegas's water supply.

Southern Nevada has experienced drought conditions frequently for more than 20 years, the longest of which began in 2011, lasted more than 5 years, and at times reached D4 emergency conditions.

Because of ongoing drought conditions, Lake Mead, the reservoir where Nevada get its Colorado River allocation, has been reduced to 40 percent with water levels having fallen more than 140 feet at Lake Mead since the onset of drought conditions.

As a community, we've come to operate as though drought is our new normal. That new normal equates to extreme steps to conserve.

Through these challenges, Southern Nevada has become a global leader in conservation. Even as our population has grown, we have found ways to reduce water usage and make the most of this precious resource. We have established strict codes on new homes and



commercial buildings, removed unnecessary turf, implemented public awareness campaigns and we strongly encourage everyone to incorporate good water management into their daily lives. And we've been aggressive in experimenting with new innovations.

As a result, in Southern Nevada, 99 percent of all indoor water use that reaches the sanitary sewer is captured, treated, and reused.

I want to highlight a few of the very significant ways the business community has been a leader in conservation.

SNWA's Water Smart Landscapes Program has yielded remarkable water savings by removing 189 million square feet of grass and conserving over 130 billion gallons of water since the program began in 1999.

The Water Efficient Technologies, or WET, Program offers financial incentives to commercial and multi-family property owners to install



water-efficient devices. In 2019 alone, WET projects have resulted in water savings of nearly 50 million gallons annually.

Also, the SNWA and the Southern Nevada Home Builders Association developed the Water Smart Home Program. This pilot project requires homebuilders to include water-smart landscaping, water-efficient appliances and meet other requirements to reduce water usage. Water Smart homes use approximately 49 percent less water than homes built between 1990 and 2003.

And finally, the WaterStart program that identifies real challenges facing water agencies and accelerates adoption of private-sector innovation. WaterStart has evaluated 278 prototypes and funded 22 pilot projects that have saved end users millions of dollars.

What we have demonstrated in Las Vegas is that private businesses can be strategic partners in water conservation. In Clark County, we have secured our water stability for the next 50 years.



Now – we look to the future. How can we work together to ensure water delivery for the next 100 years? What new technologies will become available to help tackle water challenges? And what investments will be needed from the federal government, either in policy or infrastructure? The Las Vegas Chamber stands ready to collaborate and serve even more.

I want to thank Chairman McSally and Ranking Member Cortez Masto for your leadership on this important issue and for the honor and opportunity to provide testimony today before this Subcommittee. I look forward to the Las Vegas Chamber partnering with this committee on future water policy innovation initiatives.