

NEWS RELEASE- FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UTE INDIAN TRIBE - UTAH MUST HONOR ITS WORD ON COLORADO RIVER WATER

Ft. Duchesne, UT (March 5, 2021) —This week the Ute Indian Tribal Business Committee wrote to Utah Governor Spencer Cox seeking an amendment to a bill in the Utah State Legislature, HB 297, that would create a Colorado River Authority. The Tribe's amendment would clarify that under controlling law the Authority cannot impact or diminish the Tribe's senior Indian reserved water rights in the Colorado River Basin or elsewhere in the State.

The Ute Indian Tribal Business Committee commented:

We were a tribe long before Utah was a state and controlling law prevents Utah or its Colorado River Authority from taking any action that would impact our water rights. After more than a century of broken agreements and attacks on our waters, state laws like HB 297 must be clear that the State cannot diminish or impact our Indian reserved water rights. Respecting the Tribe's rights to its lands, resources and waters was part of the deal Utah made when it joined the United States. It is time for Utah to live up to its word.

The Tribe noted that limits on the new Authority must be clearly stated in HB 297 because the Authority is specifically designed to avoid transparency and accountability in its management, negotiation, and pursuit of water projects. The Tribe's amendment would help to prevent the Authority from taking actions, either intentionally or unintentionally, that could create conflicts and result in unwanted litigation over water resources.

An amendment acknowledging that the Authority cannot impact the Tribe's water rights would also help put the State on more solid footing in its negotiations and development of water projects. The State's continuing attacks on the Tribe's water rights and the State's refusal to negotiate a free and fair settlement with the Tribe, has created a cloud of uncertainty and mistrust as the State looks to negotiate with other Colorado River Basin states.

The Tribe also suggested that even if the Utah Legislature is unwilling to recongize the limits on the Authority through an amendment, as the Executive of the State, Governor Cox has a responsibility to ensure that State laws do not violate controlling law on water rights and should issue a signing statement clarifying that the Authority cannot impact or diminish the Tribe's water rights.

***About the Ute Indian Tribe** - The Ute Indian Tribe resides on the Uintah and Ouray Reservation in northeastern Utah. Three bands of Utes comprise the Ute Indian Tribe: the Whiteriver Band, the Uncompahgre Band and the Uintah Band. The Tribe has a membership of more than three thousand individuals, with over half living on the Uintah and Ouray Reservation. The Ute Indian Tribe operates its own tribal government and oversees significant oil and gas deposits on its 4.5 million acre Reservation. The Tribal Business Committee is the governing council of the Tribe.*

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