

United States Senate

SELECT COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

July 27, 1979

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS ON WATER SUIT

The Department of Justice and the Department of the Interior, as you know, has filed suit in the United States District Court against several thousand water users in the State of Montana to adjudicate the water rights of the Milk, Marias, Poplar and Flathead Rivers.

I believe this action will impose a heavy financial burden on those who have been served with a summons and who have been or will be forced to secure legal counsel to protect their water rights. If possible, I hope public hearings can serve as the basis for either withdrawal or narrowing of the suit as well as provide necessary legal fee costs for those who have been served summons.

I believe that valid existing water rights have been placed in doubt and confusion by this federal lawsuit.

I intend to do everything possible to resolve these water rights disputes through negotiations or legislation rather than through protracted and expensive litigation.

As Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs, I am scheduling a hearing in Washington, D.C., on July 30, 1979, to receive testimony and to question the intent of the Departments of Justice and Interior and four separate hearings in Montana during August to give you an opportunity to present your views and offer suggestions for resolving this dispute.

The hearings will be as follows:

Glasgow	-	August 10
Cut Bank	-	August 15
Billings	-	August 24
Ronan	-	August 31

July 23, 1979

As one of those named in the complaint I would welcome your attendance at the hearing on your particular river system, and/or the submission of a statement for the Hearing Record.

Organizations representing water users, the State of Montana Attorney General, Counties, Cities, and Indian Tribes will be allotted time for testimony. Please contact me by calling (406)657-6644, or writing to my Billings office, 1016 Federal Building, Billings, Montana 59101, at least 10 days prior to the hearing date you expect to attend so I will be able to prepare an agenda to accommodate all interested parties. The record will remain open for 30 days after each hearing during which time the Committee will receive additional testimony for inclusion in the record.

Best regards.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Melcher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J".

John Melcher
Chairman