

# The Sunday Chieftain & Star-Journal

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## A big blunder

**L**AST WEEK, during a congressional hearing on a bill to reauthorize the Fryingpan-Arkansas Project and provide for a study on increasing storage capacity, the Bush administration surprised many by testifying against the measure, House Resolution 3881.

John Keys, commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which built and owns the project, said the bureau needs to conduct a thorough study of the proposal, which could take several years. He said expansion of storage capacity would need analysis of how that would affect fish and wildlife, flood control, recreation, conservation of scenery, as well as historic and archaeological concerns.

The City of Pueblo objects to the proposal and has hired water lawyer Ann Castle of Denver. She pointed out that currently there is no legal authority allowing the project to be used for storage of non-project water.

That's precisely what the Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District has argued in annual objections to the Bureau's contracts to allow Aurora to store water in Lake Pueblo. But now the Conservancy District has negotiated with Aurora to expressly allow that sprawling Denver suburb storage rights so that it can send Southeastern Colorado's water 100 miles north out of this river basin.

Furthermore, Ms. Castle testified, H.R. 3881 would allow future transfers of ever more water out of this valley if Aurora or some other Denver-area city or county could wheedle a deal out of the Southeastern District. That's why it is so important to get members on the Conservancy District's board who oppose further rape of this valley's water.

Another objector to H.R. 3881 during last week's hearing was Kansas Attorney General Carla Stovall. While we have been critical of some of the methods Kansas has used in its ongoing Supreme Court suit against Colorado over the Colorado-Kansas Compact, she said that more storage may result in a depletion of streamflow to Kansas. That could result in a new round of costly litigation.

The way H.R. 3881 is written, its approval would be a big blunder. The expansion is mostly designed for the benefit of Aurora and Colorado Springs and is being meekly supported by several of the Lower Arkansas Valley members of the Conservancy District board.

That in the long run would severely damage the future for the Lower Arkansas Valley, its economy and its people. That's not a moral proposition.

If people want a study of increased storage to aid the valley in periods of drought and for future growth in the valley, that's OK.

But no more water should be allowed to be sucked out of the Arkansas River so that Aurora can gobble up more vast areas of Eastern Colorado and herd more population within its boundaries for the advantage of its politicians.