

Good afternoon. Again, my name is Michelle Pierce. I am the chair of the Gunnison Basin Roundtable and have been for the past 6 years. I should tell you right now, however, that the following comments are mine and are not meant to represent the opinion or viewpoint of the Gunnison Basin Roundtable membership.

For those of you who don't know, I'm also the Town Manager for Lake City and have worked for the Town for the past 26 years. I mention this in the hopes that it will help you understand where I'm coming from with my remarks. My primary function with the Town is to solve problems, whether they be trivial or quite significant. Yes, these problems need to be identified. Yes, good plans must be developed and resources must be allocated. Most importantly, however, is the will and ability to implement the solutions.

Along with many of you, I have been a participant in the Roundtable process for going on six years now. In that time, we've been educated on a wide variety of water-related topics and a number of studies have either been completed or are underway. We've provided funding for a large number of projects and studies and have felt pretty good about their results. We've come to understand that our needs are diverse and that solutions must be multi-faceted. Although good progress towards meeting some of our own needs has been made, we are still falling short of the overall goal to develop and implement solutions that will assist the State of Colorado in meeting its current and future water needs.

Additionally, while the original HB 1177 legislation provided funding and other resources for the roundtable process for the first 5 years, the continued allocation of funds and other resources is now contingent upon making real progress in meeting this overall goal. Anything short of that will almost certainly result in the dissolution of the roundtable process altogether. And we will have lost this unique opportunity to foster and encourage a collaborative process among all stakeholders in the State to develop plans that will, to the greatest degree possible, provide for everyone's needs and desires.

We've talked a lot about the need for the conservation and reuse of water. We've talked a lot about the desire to protect agriculture by finding alternatives

to the practice of buying up agricultural water rights and converting them to municipal and industrial uses.

We've talked a lot about the need to provide water for environmental and recreational uses. We've acknowledged that recreation is a large economic driver for statewide tourism. We've also acknowledged that preserving and protecting our natural environment is not only important for the protection of species, but also for the feeding of our human souls.

We've talked a lot about the need to rehabilitate and expand existing reservoirs. And finally, we've talked a lot about the critical need to protect all users from the inevitability of the administration of a call against the 1922 Colorado River Compact agreement.

But we're still missing the mark. Even if we pulled a rabbit out of our hats and were able to identify and implement plans to address each of these concerns, we still will not have tackled the elephant in the room, which is, of course, the current and future demand for water to serve communities along the Front Range and eastern slope.

My purpose in proposing this agenda item for today's meeting is to initiate substantive discussions about how we, as representatives of the West Slope water community, can assist the State of Colorado in meeting its current and future water needs. We all know that there is considerable pressure being placed on Front Range and Eastern Slope water providers to meet current and future demands and that these providers, in turn, are looking to the west slope for solutions.

At the risk of oversimplifying a complex science, I want to say right here that, once you peel the layers back on the studies that have been conducted regarding water availability, it's clear to me that in dry years we have no water while in wet years we do. Doesn't it seem that part of the solution lies in doing something in those wet years that will cover our needs in those dry years?

Although my experience and knowledge in these matters are limited to my 6-year history with the Gunnison Roundtable, I see the writing on the wall. If we don't

take control of our future and destiny by putting some solid ideas out on the table for a west slope project that will directly benefit the population centers along the Front Range and Eastern Slope, the water providers in these areas certainly will.

The recent report that was released by the Colorado Water Institute from the Ag/Urban/Environmental Water Sharing initiative was enlightening, informative and contains innovative and imaginative examples of water sharing successes. The Colorado River Cooperative Agreement that involves 34 parties with a geographic scope that ranges from the Front Range, across the Continental Divide, to the western state line is another example of water sharing success.

I believe we can use a similar approach through an innovative and imaginative partnership among west slope and east slope water interests. Given the high level of expertise and experience that exists among the members of all of our Roundtables, conservation districts, conservancy districts, water providers, IBCC and CWCB, we should not only be able to meet our statewide goals, we should be able to surpass them to the greatest possible benefit for all.

In my opinion, it's time to meet these challenges head on with open minds, open hearts, real data and real results. We have identified the problem and know where to find resources. What we seem to lack is a comprehensive plan, based on a 360 degree analysis of the problem, and the will to implement it.

The question is, are we willing to actively participate in developing this plan? Or are we simply going to continue to just say no and hope that it's enough to protect us from the unrelenting pressures being placed on us by Front Range and Eastern Slope water providers? Knowing that these providers have both money and politics on their side, doesn't this approach seem like we're sticking our heads in the sand while pretending that we've also covered our asses?

In my experience, it takes a 'can-do' attitude to identify and implement meaningful and creative solutions to any problem. My great-grandmother had a saying – "Can't never did anything." Over the past six years, I've heard over and over again about how this or that idea or solution can't possibly work. But I now

know better than that and I believe most of you do too. We've learned too much and have listened to too many points of view to uphold this belief any longer.

It's been said that insanity is the practice of continuing to do the same thing over and over again while expecting different results. Are we insane?

What if the historical dialogue in our state regarding water supply issues shifted from what we can't do to what we can? What if we were actually able to develop and implement plans that solved the problem of providing water to meet the State's current and future demands?

It's clear to me that we are now at a crossroads with the Roundtable process and that what we do from here on out will determine its ultimate fate. It's also clear to me that, regardless of our location in Colorado, we are all human beings with many of the same challenges, needs and desires regarding the use of water.

So, how does the West Slope respond to the Interbasin Compact Committee Report? It's my hope that we will respond by rising to the challenges outlined in the report and bring ourselves to the table with open minds, honest dialogue, sharp intellects and a focus on the possibilities rather than the impossibilities. To quote a small piece of the report, "Unfortunately, knowing what can and needs to be done does not automatically translate into getting it done. To provide water for Colorado's future needs is not just a simple question of project funding, but also raises social and cultural issues inherent in managing increasing scarcity and competition for available water. Success will require an unprecedented commitment by all parties."

I want to close by issuing a challenge to everyone in this room to suspend your judgment and your fears and to open your minds and hearts to the possibility of working together with all interests across the state to solve our water problems once and for all. A mind-boggling and daunting task to be sure but, again, given the experience, expertise and resources that exist among us all, it's not one that is out of reach.

We can do this. We must do this. Thank you.