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Sen. Salazar: Hold stays until I have meeting about Roan

By GARY HARMON The Daily Sentinel

Friday, July 13, 2007

U.S. Sen. Ken Salazar, D-Colo., on Thursday maintained his hold preventing President Bush's nominee to head the Bureau of Land Management from advancing to a confirmation vote.

Until he meets with Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne, Salazar told nominee James Caswell during a hearing before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee he would keep the hold on Caswell's nomination.

Salazar's maneuver is intended to pressure Kempthorne into agreeing to allow Colorado's new governor 120 days to study plans for drilling on former Naval Oil Shale Reserve lands known as the Roan Plateau in Garfield County.

Salazar said he planned to meet with Kempthorne in the next week or two.

Interior Department officials responded with silence to Gov. Bill Ritter's request, Salazar said.

Colorado's five northwestern counties now have 5,000 gas wells, but will have 60,000 of them in 15 years, Salazar said.

"I'm not against development of our natural resources in Colorado and the West," Salazar said. "I want to make sure we have collaboration."

Caswell, who managed public lands in Idaho while Kempthorne was governor of that state, said he stressed collaboration.

"It's part of my fabric," he said. "It's how I function."

Salazar said he hopes Caswell eventually wins confirmation.

In written questions, Salazar asked whether Caswell would work with local communities on oil shale and the completion of a programmatic environmental impact statement before moving into commercial oil shale leasing.

He asked Caswell to describe how he would balance drilling and environmental protections.

He also sought a commitment for the federal agency to work with wildlife officials on protecting wildlife habitat on the Roan Plateau.

No responses to the written questions were immediately available.

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