

The Associated Press

February 4, 2004

Environmental, Civil Rights Groups Oppose Bush Judicial Nominee

By Terence Chea

A coalition of environmental, civil rights and American Indian groups are fighting President Bush's newest nominee to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, claiming William G. Myers III has a record of weakening tribal rights and protections for the environment.

As the Senate Judiciary Committee prepared to open a confirmation hearing on Myers scheduled for Wednesday, more than 60 groups signed on to a letter expressing their "strong opposition" to the former mining and cattle industry lobbyist who most recently served as the Interior Department's chief legal officer.

Although Myers is the 10th of the Bush administration's 170 judicial nominees to be opposed by environmental groups, the level of opposition to his nomination is unprecedented, said Buck Parker, executive director of Oakland-based Earthjustice.

"He has the clearest anti-environmental record of any of the nominees to date," Parker said of Myers. "He has made a career as a lobbyist and lawyer trying to overturn environmentally protective laws and regulations."

Despite the criticism, Bush administration officials stood behind the nominee.

"He's a highly respected attorney who has extensive experience in the field of natural resources, public lands and environmental law," said White House spokeswoman Erin Healy.

The San Francisco-based federal appeals court, which oversees nine states and two territories, decides a high number of environmental cases.

Before joining the Interior Department in July 2001, Myers worked as a lobbyist for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, the Public Lands Council and several mining companies. He left that position in October to return to a law practice in Boise, Idaho.

While Myer was solicitor at the Interior Department, environmental groups requested an investigation into his meetings with former lobbying clients and mining and grazing industry representatives. A recent department investigation, however, found that Myers didn't violate any government ethics rules.

In their letter, groups opposing Myers' nomination said he "devoted his career to advancing the interests of grazing and mining industries at the expense of the environment and rights of Native Americans and tribal governments."

Groups who sent the letter to the Senate include the Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council, Friends of the Earth, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights and Alliance for Justice.

In November, the National Congress of American Indians, which represents 250 tribal governments, adopted a resolution opposing Myers' nomination, claiming that he engineered a rollback of protections for sacred tribal sites on federal land.