

## **House Subcommittee Draws Attention to Aging Water Infrastructure Issue**

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Before the Wall Street financial crisis hit late last month, Democratic leaders in the House of Representatives had hinted at a second economic stimulus package to be considered before Congress left this fall. Among other elements, the new stimulus package would include more infrastructure funding. For the second time this year, House Water and Power Subcommittee Chairwoman Grace Napolitano, Democrat from Southern California, sent a letter to Appropriations Committee leaders requesting that water-related infrastructure be given attention as leaders in the House consider additional actions to stimulate the economy.

In her September 10, 2008 letter, Chairwoman Napolitano requested consideration of three infrastructure requests: 1) Infusion of funding into the Bureau of Reclamation's Title XVI program for water reuse and recycling programs; 2) Financial assistance for major Reclamation infrastructure repairs; and 3) Funding activities to fight the spread of Quagga mussels in Western water bodies.

“In many cases, the cost of rehabilitating the infrastructure far exceeds the initial costs of the project,” Chairwoman Napolitano explained in her letter. “This poses a significant financial burden on the beneficiaries of the projects who are required to pay for repairs and rehabilitation. I respectfully request that you consider financial assistance for these major infrastructure repairs.”

The Chairwoman's request comes at a critical time. The Bureau of Reclamation built and manages the largest part of the critical water supply infrastructure that is the foundation of the economic vitality of the 17 Western States. Much of this federally-owned infrastructure –including the Klamath Irrigation Project and the Central Valley Project, the world's largest - is now 50-100 years old, approaching the end of its design life, and needs to be rebuilt and rehabilitated for the next century. The Congressional Research Service has calculated the original development cost of this infrastructure to be over \$20 billion, and Reclamation estimates the current replacement value of its water supply and delivery infrastructure at well over \$100 billion.

Federal water supply systems are critically important to Western communities, farms, and the environment. These facilities are an essential component of the nation's food-production system and their operation helps ensure our ability to provide reliable and secure food for its own citizens and the rest of the world.

With the Senate set to return for a lame-duck session after the election, and with the House facing growing pressure to do the same as the state of the economy grows shakier by the day, there may be another opportunity for Congress to vote on a stimulus package introduced by Senators Reid and Byrd. Included in that bill is \$300 million for Bureau of Reclamation “capital improvement projects”, including rural water projects. Of this total, \$126 million would fund water re-use projects. Reclamation would receive \$50 million to rehabilitate its hydropower facilities. Reclamation could also use up to \$5 million of the funds to launch a canal safety program that would assess the condition of water supply canals.

The House passed a \$60.8 billion stimulus package Sept. 26 that included these items, and others as well, such as unemployment insurance and aid to states. A similar package was blocked in the Senate.

Although the chances for passing the stimulus package are growing increasingly slim, I am encouraged by the attention being paid to this important issue. Chairwoman Napolitano, Water and Power Subcommittee Ranking Member Rep. McMorris Rodgers (R-Washington), and the rest of the Water and Power Subcommittee are to be commended for drawing attention to our aging infrastructure challenges.