

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

December 7, 2010

The Honorable Jacob J. Lew
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Lew:

As you make your final decisions about funding levels in the Administration's FY2012 budget, we write to urge you to provide the highest possible level of funding for the Lewis & Clark Regional Water System.

We are grateful that your staff took the time to meet with members of the Iowa, South Dakota, and Minnesota delegations in September. As we relayed to your staff, this is a critical juncture for the Lewis & Clark Rural Water project. If the project were to remain at the enacted FY10 funding level, Lewis & Clark estimates the system would not be completed until 2048 (please see enclosed chart). That is simply too long for our citizens to wait for something as simple as clean water.

The federal government's commitment and contributions are vital to its success. Previous appropriations and the \$56.5 million the project received through the 2009 Recovery Act have helped make up two of the four years the project was behind schedule and will ensure completion of the system's water treatment plant. However, a project of this scope and complexity requires consistent annual appropriations and advance planning. The project sponsors have assured our offices and the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) that they can responsibly obligate significantly more than \$35 million in FY2011. We fully appreciate the balancing of priorities that must be considered while putting together the Administration's budget, and accordingly, ask that you recognize this as a priority and include the highest amount of funding possible for Lewis & Clark in the upcoming FY2012 budget.

We were disappointed that the Administration's budget recommendation for Fiscal Year 2011 included only \$2 million, a level that will not allow the project to award any new construction contracts and does not even come close to covering the cost of inflation. It is also frustrating that the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) recommended such a low amount and continues to use the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) as a justification for not funding the project at pre-stimulus levels.

This project, as required by the authorization, is a cost-share project. OMB must lead the way in making sure that this project is a priority, otherwise the investment already made by the taxpayers and state and local partners will be in jeopardy.

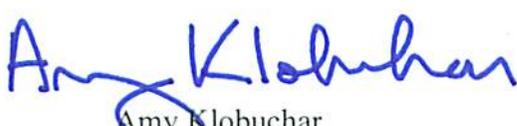
In recognition of the significant impact of this project, the local members and the three states involved have pre-paid millions of dollars to make this project a reality. In fact, the states and 20 local communities and rural water systems – including those in Minnesota and Iowa – have already committed 99.6 percent of their share requirement totaling \$109 million. Please note that the people of Iowa and Minnesota have received no water despite having paid in full their shares of \$7 million and \$5.4 million, respectively.

As well as spurring economic development in the three-state region, the project is critical to ensure residents in the tri-state area have adequate, clean drinking water. When completed, Lewis & Clark will deliver high-quality and dependable drinking water through its members to more than 300,000 tri-state area residents covering a service area the size of Connecticut.

In addition to requesting the highest possible level of funding, we ask that you share with us the steps being discussed to ensure the appropriate and responsible prioritization of Bureau of Reclamation projects across the country. Since construction on the Lewis and Clark project has been underway since 2003, we believe it should remain a top priority and be completed before new Bureau of Reclamation projects are initiated. It makes sense to complete the project and make sure our investment is well managed. We also ask that you provide us with a list of new starts projects recommended by OMB and by the House and Senate Appropriations Committees for Fiscal Year 2011. We would like this information no later than January 1, 2011.

We appreciate your consideration of this request. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions about the Lewis and Clark Regional Water System project.

Sincerely,


Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator


Charles Grassley
United States Senator


Tom Harkin
United States Senator


Tim Johnson
United States Senator


John Thune
United States Senator


Al Franken
United States Senator


Steve King
Member of Congress


Stephanie Herseth Sandlin
Member of Congress


Tim Wais
Member of Congress

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