

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

July 22, 2011

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Jacob Lew
Director
The Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Michael L. Connor
Commissioner
Bureau of Reclamation
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar, Director Lew, and Commissioner Connor:

As you plan for budget allocations for Fiscal Year 2012 and beyond, we write to urge you to provide the highest possible level of funding for the Lewis & Clark Regional Water System (LCRWS). We also request a joint meeting with all of you to discuss a path forward in ensuring this important project receives higher consideration when determining the Administration's infrastructure funding priorities.

We were disappointed at the FY11 level of funding for Lewis and Clark Regional Water System, which barely keeps the project's lights on and does nothing to move the project forward in any way. We were also disheartened to see that the Administration's budget recommendation for FY12 included only \$493,000, a level that would bring new construction to a complete halt. In addition to the recent budget numbers, we were concerned that funding requested for congressionally authorized rural water supply projects was reduced so drastically in comparison with other Bureau of Reclamation activities.

As we have previously discussed with you and your staff, this authorized project is critical for economic development and job creation. The JBS pork processing plant in Worthington, Minnesota is one of the largest in the nation and has wanted to expand its operations for several years. However, those plans have been delayed because the city cannot provide additional water.

In Madison, South Dakota, Mayor Gene Hexom has said the city would not be able to accommodate the water needs of a major business or industry looking to relocate to that area. These examples reflect a chilling effect on economic development efforts and the expansion of value-added agriculture.

LCRWS shows great promise for economic development. A dairy plant chose to locate in Hull, Iowa based upon an “emergency connection” with LCRWS and the promise of a permanent water supply in the future. The plant currently employs 100 people in a town with less than 2,000 residents and is expected to increase to 135 jobs later this year. *Through the jobs it will create during construction, and the countless economic development opportunities it will create once the water starts flowing, this project will have a huge economic benefit on the tri-state region, which is why each of us believes it is critical that the project receive consistent and prioritized funding from the Bureau of Reclamation.*

We certainly understand the severe budget constraints facing our country and appreciate the need to balance priorities. However, it is difficult to understand how a project such as this – one that has been authorized, whose local members and three state partners have prepaid 99% of their cost share (a combined total of \$153.5 million), and has shown such promise for economic development – would receive such inadequate funding.

After we met with OMB to discuss funding for LCRWS last fall, we asked you to provide us with a list of new starts projects recommended by OMB in the coming fiscal year. It would seem to us that funding a project that is 50 percent complete, that will provide drinking water to over 300,000 people in three states, and that shows such promise in creating new jobs should be a higher priority than projects that have not yet begun.

It is in that spirit we would like to further discuss this issue with you. Our schedulers will be in contact with your staff to determine a time when all of you can be available for this important discussion.

Sincerely,



Charles Grassley
United States Senator



Tom Harkin
United States Senator



Tim Johnson
United States Senator



John Thune
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Al Franken
United States Senator



Steve King
Member of Congress



Tim Walz
Member of Congress



Kristi Noem
Member of Congress