

## *Association Update*

Most of our members are aware that we have been fighting for our survival here at Nebraska Rural Water. We learned in January that we were at risk to lose funding for three of our rural water programs. The positions in questions have been funded by the EPA since their inception – Training Specialist, Ground Water Specialist, and Source Water Specialist, held by Fred Baumert, Charles Bausch, and Barney Whatley respectively.

Back in January our concern was that the funding would be considered an earmark, and therefore eliminated from EPA's budget. We were half right. Our funding was viewed as an earmark. However, it was not eliminated from EPA's budget. In fact, EPA received its usual appropriation, but without congressional direction that it be used to fund rural water programs. Anticipating this situation, our Association contacted the offices of Senator Ben Nelson, Senator Chuck Hagel, Congressman Adrian Smith, Congressman Jeff Fortenberry, and Congressman Lee Terry to ask for their support. The Nebraska delegation responded quickly and favorably. Senator Hagel and Senator Nelson each wrote letters to the EPA Administrator to stress the importance of continued funding for rural water. Representative Adrian Smith wrote and sponsored a delegation letter to the EPA in support of rural water funding as well. Representatives Fortenberry and Terry signed onto the Smith letter for a strong showing of congressional support for Nebraska Rural Water.

At the same time, similar events unfolded in every state all over the country. The EPA Administrator in Washington DC received hundreds of letters from the House of Representatives and the Senate to continue rural water program funding. Despite this, EPA made the decision that these very successful programs, which have operated in Nebraska and other states for many, many years, would not be funded.

*So where does this leave us?*

The Association will continue services through these programs to Nebraska communities until the 15<sup>th</sup> of May. Our future after May 15<sup>th</sup> remains very uncertain. In all likelihood, these three programs will come to an end. We are also faced with a strong possibility of making cuts to our office staff, and of losing our office and training facility in Wahoo.

The Association is actively pursuing other means of funding so that we can continue to provide Nebraska water systems with much needed services. Needless to say, it is awfully hard to find \$286,000 when you really need it.

*The Future*

Regardless of the end result, regardless of the blow to Nebraska water systems, this situation has made one thing very clear: the need has never been greater for rural and small town water/wastewater operators to have a more active and unified voice in government. As a group, we need to find ways that the importance of our profession is not overlooked, to find ways to insure that our hardships are not brushed aside, and to

find ways to effectively communicate issues and concerns to our elected officials. Success at doing this will only happen through you, the rural and small town operator.

Many of you wrote, called and emailed Congress to voice support for rural water. The board and staff are very grateful for your time, energy and efforts. We need to ask you to write one more letter, make one more phone call, or send one more email: to say THANK YOU to Senator Ben Nelson, Senator Chuck Hagel, Congressman Adrian Smith, Congressman Lee Terry, and Congressman Jeff Fortenberry for their support of programs that matter to rural and small town Nebraska.

To end on a positive note, it is important to realize that Nebraska Rural Water will move forward. The Association will continue to provide training and technical assistance with our two circuit riders and wastewater technician. It will not be business as usual, but the Association will carry on, with your help. It is important for the rural and small town operator to know that Nebraska Rural Water will still be here when you need us.



On March 1<sup>st</sup>, (left to right) Larry Wennekamp – NeRWA Board Member, Dave Houghtelling – City of Cambridge, Christy Christiansen – City of Papillion, and Tom Goulette – NeRWA Board President, traveled to Washington DC to meet with Nebraska Senators and Representatives and ask for their support of rural water program funding.