

Rural Water Policy Advisory [4/16/2018]

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Special Single Issue Edition: H.R. 2, “The Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018”

House Farm Bill Great for Rural Water: On April 12, 2018, House Agriculture Committee Chairman Mike Conaway from Texas introduced his version of the 2018 Farm Bill: “The Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018 ([H.R. 2](#)).” The House Agriculture Committee is scheduled to begin debate on the proposal this Wednesday. H.R. 2 represents three years of work, 113 hearings and six listening sessions around the country attended by more than 1,100 people. The Farm Bill is the primary rural development, agricultural and food policy legislation of the federal government. Many of the most essential federal policy agenda items for NRWA are authorized in the Farm Bill including USDA rural water grant and loans, wastewater technical assistance, Circuit Riders, source water protection, Section 1926(b) territorial protection, USDA’s emergency water assistance grant program, etc. We are grateful the House Committee’s bill included all NRWA legislative requests including the following summarized provisions:

- **Section 6204; Water, Waste Disposal, and Wastewater Facility Grants:** Authorizes USDA’s rural water loans and grants.
- **Section 6205 & 6206; Rural Water and Wastewater Circuit Rider Program:** Authorizes rural water Circuit Riders and Wastewater Technicians, the primary technical assistance for local communities to operate safe and clean drinking water and wastewater systems and to help ensure compliance with current water regulations.
- **Section 2402; Grassroots Source Water Protection Program:** Authorizes the NRWA source water protection initiative to assist rural and small communities in protecting drinking water sources from potential contamination.
- **Section 6204; Water, Waste Disposal, and Wastewater Facility Grants:** Retains 7 U.S.C. §1926(b), service area protection from unfair annexation, condemnation or competition. This law has been under continual attack in Congress by utilities that desire unfair capture of their neighbor’s service area. NRWA has been successful in marshalling the strength of our association to persuade Congress to resist changing the law.
- **Section 6208; Emergency Community Water Assistance Grant Program:** Authorizes USDA to provide funding to eligible communities to recover from an emergency that threatens the availability of safe drinking water.
- **Section 2503; Administrative Requirements for Conservation Programs:** Allows some of the existing source water protection programs within the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to be targeted to protecting “*source waters for drinking water (including protecting against public health threats) while also benefiting agricultural produce.*”

Section 6205 allows for a new federal initiative to allow Circuit Riders to assist local communities with long-term water infrastructure sustainability through intergovernmental partnerships, regionalization, and voluntary consolidation. NRWA cautioned the Committee about endorsing any new federal policies *to force* local governments to consolidate or be taken over by a private water company. The decision for any local government to privatize or consolidate should be determined at the discretion of local citizens. NRWA supports intergovernmental partnerships when it makes local economic sense because growing economies of scale result in lower cost to the consumer than operating independent water utilities. Rural water technical assistance has led to or assisted in more communities consolidating their water supplies than any program, policy or organization.

The Power of an Association: For the last three years, NRWA has been implementing a grassroots advocacy campaign to persuade Congress to include our rural and small community water provisions in the next Farm Bill. NRWA has testified three times since March of last year in Congress regarding our Farm Bill positions:



Steve Fletcher, Illinois Rural Water Association
([March 9, 2017](#)) House of Representatives Agriculture Committee



Brian Macmanus, Texas Rural Water Association
([July 17, 2017](#)) House of Representatives Agriculture Committee



Elmer Ronnebaum, Kansas Rural Water Association
([September 28, 2017](#)) Senate Committee on Agriculture

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The National Rural Water Association is the country's largest public drinking water and sanitation supply organization with over 30,000 members. Safe drinking water and sanitation are generally recognized as the most essential public health, public welfare, and civic necessities.

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