

January 11, 2021

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
The Honorable Mitch McConnell
The Honorable Kevin McCarthy

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leaders Schumer, McConnell, and McCarthy:

As you consider further economic stimulus measures during the 117th session of Congress to help our country recover from the negative impacts of COVID-19, we urge that you address the shortcomings of our aging Western agricultural and rural water infrastructure in any future infrastructure or recovery package. We represent thousands of Western farmers, ranchers, water providers, businesses and communities who provide the food our nation relies upon through use of millions of acres of productive land, as well as many of the local and regional public water agencies that supply water to over fifty million Western urban, suburban and rural residents. Our organizations collectively believe that federal investment in a diversified water management portfolio is essential. Such a portfolio MUST be included as essential infrastructure in the next infrastructure or recovery package.

The American West's farmers and ranchers have responded to COVID-19 by developing new ways to grow the nation's food supply while protecting workers on the frontlines, and keeping the nation fed. But the COVID-19 crisis, as with all industries, has revealed weaknesses in agriculture that must be addressed. Our nation clearly needs a stable domestic food supply that both nourishes Americans and safeguards national security. Food security is an issue everyone should be taking more seriously. We cannot wait until the supermarket shelves are empty to take action to protect our ability to feed ourselves and much of the world.

Our nation's water suppliers are also critical service providers. Agricultural and municipal water providers have worked tirelessly throughout the COVID-19 crisis to provide uninterrupted water service and wastewater treatment for irrigation, major cities, at risk communities, and businesses.

To ensure that food can continue to be safely and affordably produced in the West, and that communities, large and small, continue to have access to the water critical to their economies and their health, our organizations believe that critical water supply and wastewater treatment reliability improvements must be included as a necessary part of any federal infrastructure investment. Providing a stable water future for the West will also strengthen our rural communities who often struggle to address water quantity and quality challenges. Beyond longer-term impacts to the West, these infrastructure projects would also bring vital construction jobs which will greatly benefit rural communities impacted by COVID-19 in their efforts to recover. Nationwide, we believe American jobs will also benefit as equipment and materials for these water projects will be provided by American firms.

It has never been more critical that our country prioritize the initial and continual investment in Western water infrastructure necessary to meet current and future demands. Existing water and wastewater infrastructure in the West is aging, as most of the federal water infrastructure projects that benefit our Western communities, from the largest cities to the smallest farms, were built more than 50 years ago. Now, they are in desperate need of rehabilitation and improvement.

In addition, as hydrological conditions in the West change and populations expand, the impacts from our failure to address aging water infrastructure has become increasingly acute, raising serious questions about the system's continued viability without immediate attention. By investing in improvements to water infrastructure and expanding useable supplies today, we believe the nation can prevent a breakdown in the water supply and irrigation systems across the landscape, which could avoid further shortening of supplies and the potential for increased conflict over water supplies.

Pressure is growing to 'solve' current urban and environmental water shortages by simply moving water away from Western irrigated agriculture. If this continues, we will see rising conflict between agricultural, rural, urban and environmental stakeholders, as well as a further decline in our national food security. A visionary bipartisan federal infrastructure package should seek to bolster our aging water infrastructure to keep water flowing to our nation's farms and ranches simultaneous to making improvements for cities and the environment.

Our organizations collectively believe that federal investment in water conservation, water recycling, watershed management, conveyance, desalination, water transfers, groundwater storage, and surface storage is urgently needed for a diversified water management portfolio and that such a portfolio MUST be included as essential infrastructure in the next infrastructure or recovery package. Specific recommended actions include:

- Water conservation, one of the most cost-effective actions that can positively affect water supply stability, needs to continue to be aggressively pursued in conjunction with new water storage and other actions.
- New funding will be needed to kick-start new water recycling, reuse and desalination projects currently being studied or that are ready for construction.
- Additional funding should support new reservoir facilities and operations at existing dams to address climate change risks.
- Programs that fund water conservation and management improvements, fish passage and recovery, and habitat restoration - all in support of water project operations in the Reclamation states of the West, are in need of additional funding to accelerate construction of this "ready-to-go" infrastructure. Bipartisan legislation, including the *Drought Resiliency and Water Supply Infrastructure Act*, among others, lay out a comprehensive vision for how multiple objectives like this can be achieved.

- Environmentally and hydrologically sound investments in new water storage – both surface water and groundwater in order to adapt to a changing hydrology and develop usable and sustainable supplies to meet growing demands for water. We believe that water storage projects should be geared to local circumstances and needs. In some cases, storage projects will be above ground, in others they will be below ground. Additionally, some will be traditional construction using American steel and concrete, while others will be ‘green’ natural infrastructure projects - all dependent on the wide variety of local needs in place across the West.
- The federal government must remain an active financial partner and expand its involvement in finding 21st century solutions to these water problems in the West. It can do so, either through direct funding to help meet these needs or by developing and expanding federal financing mechanisms (such as the EPA’s *Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act*) that have a very low cost to the Treasury and to taxpayers. Future tax legislation should preserve tax-exempt financing and also restore the ability to issue tax-exempt advance refunding bonds.
- Additional federal funding for affordable long-term loans from the Bureau of Reclamation to local districts operating and maintaining federally-owned irrigation projects. These local entities are in need of affordable financing for immediate extraordinary repairs and rehabilitation on their federally-owned canals and water delivery structures as was highlighted in the bipartisan *Water Supply Infrastructure Rehabilitation and Utilization Act*. Most, if not all, of these major construction projects are ready to proceed if direct financing was made available. In short, water resource infrastructure investments should be made more attractive and affordable for the non-federal entities responsible for maintaining these critical facilities.
- Water quality challenges are also critical factors in many communities across the rural West. Many of these challenges can be positively impacted by the proposals above. As an example, an increase in water supply flowing to rural communities can help stabilize water needs. New supplies can be recharged into aquifers, which can help improve underlying water quality. This is especially important in rural areas where groundwater aquifers have been significantly depleted and water levels are critical. Often those communities are faced with the twin challenge of not having enough water for their needs and the water they have being of poor quality. Enhanced water supplies, environmental projects and new conveyance systems can help provide water as well as help recharge depleted aquifers, which in turn help improve rural communities’ water quantity and quality over time.
- Beyond monetary assistance, the federal government should also bring forward policy changes that help ensure that water projects are built in a timely fashion. Making funding available for projects is useless if projects take decades to be approved. In the past, Congress has, on a bipartisan basis, put forward significant efforts to improve the efficiency of environmental regulation and permitting processes for other types of infrastructure development. Water infrastructure should not be treated any differently and any infrastructure package should address this concern by streamlining the regulations and permitting processes for water

projects. Commonsense process improvements were included in the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009* and can be used as a model for success, as well as others, to ensure timely construction of projects.

- Finally, in order to respond to current and future water shortages, Congress must also encourage federal agencies to implement a more cooperative approach toward achieving multiple goals under existing environmental laws and regulations. And, where such approaches are currently in law, Congress should encourage these agencies to use any and all flexibilities under the law to act with the urgency and promptness that this crisis demands.

As you are already aware, water infrastructure investments not only provide immediate short-term economic benefits and create jobs – vital to a nation facing massive job loss – they are the foundation that the economy will need for the foreseeable future.

If and when additional infrastructure funding is discussed as part of a larger economic stimulus package, we need your help to ensure that federal dollars flow and timely improvements are constructed to our nation’s critical aging water infrastructure needs.

We look forward to working with you to address this critical need and national security interest.

Sincerely,

A&B Irrigation District (ID)
Agribusiness & Water Council of Arizona
Almond Alliance of California
American AgCredit
American Agri-Women
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Farmland Trust
Arnold Irrigation District (OR)
Arizona Cattle Feeders Association
Arizona Cotton Growers Association
Arizona Farm and Ranch Group
Arizona Farm Bureau
Association of California Water Agencies
Biggs-West Gridley Water District (CA)
Black Canyon Irrigation District (ID)
Boise-Kuna Irrigation District (ID)
Browns Valley Irrigation District (CA)
Butte Water District (CA)
California Agricultural Irrigation Association
California Alfalfa & Forage Association
California Apple Commission
California Association of Wheat Growers
California Avocado Commission

California Bean Shippers Association
California Blueberry Association
California Blueberry Commission
California Cattlemen’s Association
California Citrus Mutual
California Cotton Alliance
California Cotton Ginners & Growers Assoc.
California Farm Bureau
California Farm Water Alliance
California Fresh Fruit Association
California Grain & Feed Association
California Seed Association
California State Beekeepers Association
California State Floral Association
California Walnut Commission
California Warehouse Association
California Water Alliance
California Water Service
California Women for Agriculture
Carlsbad Irrigation District (NM)
Central California Irrigation District
Central Arizona
Irrigation and Drainage District

Central Oregon Irrigation District
 Central Nebraska
 Public Power and Irrigation District
 Central Utah Water Conservancy District
 Central Valley Project Water Association (CA)
 Charleston Drainage District (CA)
 City of Shasta Lake (CA)
 CoBank
 Colorado Farm Bureau
 Colorado
 Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association
 Colorado Potato Administrative Committee
 Colorado River
 Energy Distributors Association
 Colorado River District (CO)
 Colorado Water Congress
 Columbia Basin Development League (WA)
 Columbia Canal Company (CA)
 Del Puerto Water District (CA)
 Deschutes Basin Board of Control (OR)
 Dolores Water Conservancy District (CO)
 Dunnigan Water District (CA)
 Eagle Field Water District (CA)
 East Columbia Basin Irrigation District (WA)
 Eastern Municipal Water District (CA)
 Electrical District #3 of Pinal County (AZ)
 Elephant Butte Irrigation District (NM)
 Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District (CA)
 Family Farm Alliance
 Family Water Alliance (CA)
 Farm Credit Council
 Farmers Conservation Alliance (OR)
 Farwell Irrigation District (NE)
 Far West Equipment Dealers Association
 Fremont-Madison Irrigation District (ID)
 Fresno Madera Farm Credit, ACA (CA)
 Friant Water Authority (CA)
 Garrison Diversion Conservancy District (ND)
 Glenn-Colusa Irrigation District (CA)
 Groundwater Management Districts Assoc.
 Grower-Shipper Association of Santa Barbara
 and San Luis Obispo Counties (CA)
 Hawaii Farm Bureau
 Idaho Dairymen's Association
 Idaho Farm Bureau

San Luis & Delta-Mendota
 Water Authority (CA)
 Idaho Potato Commission
 Idaho Water Resources Research Institute
 Idaho Water Users Association
 Imperial Irrigation District (CA)
 Imperial Valley
 Vegetable Growers Association (CA)
 Irrigation & Electrical Districts Association
 of Arizona
 Kansas Bostwick Irrigation District
 Kansas Water Congress
 King Hill Irrigation District (ID)
 Kings River Conservation District (CA)
 Kittitas County Farm Bureau (WA)
 Kittitas Reclamation District. (WA)
 Kittitas County Timothy Hay
 Growers & Suppliers (WA)
 Klamath Irrigation District (OR)
 Klamath Water Users Association (OR)
 Lindsay-Strathmore Irrigation District (CA)
 Little Snake River Conservation District (WY)
 Little Snake River
 Water Conservancy District (WY)
 Maricopa-Stanfield
 Irrigation & Drainage District (AZ)
 McKinleyville
 Community Services District (CA)
 Mercy Springs Water District (CA)
 Meridian Farms Water Company (CA)
 Modesto Irrigation District (CA)
 Montana Farm Bureau
 Montana Water Resources Association
 Monterey One Water (CA)
 Monterey Peninsula
 Water Management District (CA)
 National Cattlemen's Beef Association
 Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District (ID)
 National Onion Association
 National Pecan Federation
 National Water Resources Association
 Natomas Mutual Water Company (CA)
 Nebraska Farm Bureau
 Nevada Farm Bureau Federation
 Nevada Irrigation District (CA)

New Magma
 Irrigation and Drainage District (AZ)
 New Mexico Chile Association
 New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau
 Niobrara Conservation District (WY)
 North Dakota Water Users Association
 Northern California Water Association
 Northern Water (CO)
 Water Conservancy District
 North Side Canal Company (ID)
 North Unit Irrigation District (OR)
 Ochoco Irrigation District (OR)
 Olive Growers Council of California
 Orange Cove Irrigation District (CA)
 Oregon Association of Nurseries
 Oregon Farm Bureau
 Oregon Potato Commission
 Oregon Water Resources Congress
 Orland Unit Water Users Association (CA)
 Pacific Egg and Poultry Association
 Panoche Drainage District (CA)
 Panoche Water District (CA)
 Patterson Irrigation District (CA)
 Pioneer Irrigation District (ID)
 Portneuf Irrigating Company (ID)
 Pot Hook Water Conservancy District (CO)
 Princeton-Codora-Glenn Irrig. District (CA)
 Provident Irrigation District (CA)
 Public Lands Council
 Queen Creek Irrigation District (AZ)
 Quincy-Columbia Basin I.D. (WA)
 Reclamation District No. 108 (CA)
 Reclamation District 1500 (CA)
 Richvale Irrigation District (CA)
 River Garden Farms (CA)
 Rocky Mountain Farmers Union
 Roza Irrigation District (WA)
 Roza-Sunnyside Joint Board of Control (WA)
 Rubicon Water (facilities in CA and CO)
 Sacramento River
 Settlement Contractors Corporation (CA)
 San Carlos
 Irrigation and Drainage District (AZ)
 San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors
 Water Authority (CA)
 San Juan Water District (CA)
 San Luis Canal Company (CA)
 San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority
 Salt River Project (AZ)
 Sargent Irrigation District (NE)
 Solano Irrigation District (CA)
 South Columbia Basin Irrigation District (WA)
 Southeastern Colorado
 Water Conservancy District
 Southwestern Water
 Conservation District (CO)
 Southwest Kansas
 Groundwater Management District No. 3
 South Valley Water Association (CA)
 South Yuba Water District (CA)
 Sunnyside Division Board of Control (WA)
 Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District (WA)
 Sutter Extension Water District (CA)
 Sutter Mutual Water Company (CA)
 Swalley Irrigation District (OR)
 Tehama Colusa Canal Authority (CA)
 Truckee-Carson Irrigation District (NV)
 Tulare Lake Basin Water Storage District (CA)
 Tulelake Irrigation District (CA)
 Tumalo Irrigation District (OR)
 Turlock Irrigation District (CA)
 United Potato Growers of America
 United Water Conservation District (CA)
 Utah Farm Bureau
 Ventura County Agricultural Association (CA)
 Washington Farm Bureau
 Washington State Potato Commission
 Washington State Water Resources Association
 WaterReuse Association
 Weber Basin Water Conservancy District (UT)
 Wellton-Mohawk
 Irrigation and Drainage District (AZ)
 Western Agricultural Processors Association
 Western Canal Water District (CA)
 Western Growers Association
 Western Urban Water Coalition
 Wyoming Farm Bureau
 Yakima Basin Joint Board (WA)
 Yakima-Tieton Irrigation District (WA)
 Yosemite Farm Credit (CA)
 Yuba Water Agency (CA)