



THE SPIGOT

from the NORTH DAKOTA RURAL WATER SYSTEMS ASSOCIATION

Legislation to Promote, Protect Rural Water Supplies Signed into Law

U.S. Sen. Heidi Heitkamp (D-N.D.) announced that President Barack Obama signed into law her bipartisan legislation to help make sure small and rural towns across the country have access to clean drinking water.

Heitkamp introduced the Grassroots Rural and Small Community Water Systems Assistance Act with Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Miss.) in March to make sure small towns and rural areas have the necessary technical assistance and training to protect and improve their water supplies. Now that the bill is law, small and rural towns – often lacking the resources to the latest technology or access to proper technological assistance to comply with federal drinking water rules – will have access to federal assistance to help them offset the cost of complying. Specifically, Heitkamp and Wicker’s bill will provide \$15 million in annual support for technical assistance and training to make sure residents and business in small and rural towns can access clean drinking water.

The President’s signature of Heitkamp’s bill follows its passage in the U.S. House of Representatives in November, and the Senate’s unanimous approval of the legislation in June.

“Having grown up in a small town like Mantador, I know how important linking rural communities across North Dakota to vital lifelines like safe, reliable drinking water is,” says Heitkamp. “Today we are helping make that goal feasible, as the president signed the bipartisan bill I introduced with Sen. Wicker to make sure families and businesses in small and rural communities have the latest technology and the training to access clean drinking water. Every farming and rural town across our state needs access to essential resources like clean drinking water to keep our statewide community connected and safe.”

“More than 90 percent of the drinking water supplied in our country comes from small and rural communities, many of which lack the resources to meet revised EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] safe drinking water standards,” says Wicker. “In order for these areas to comply



U.S. Sen. Heidi Heitkamp

with federal regulations, they need greater access to critical assistance and training programs. I am pleased that Sen. Heitkamp, Rep. [Greg] Harper [R-Miss.], and I were able to work together on a bill that helps guarantee that the nation’s rural areas will be able to provide safe, clean water for their citizens.”

“Sen. Heitkamp has been steadfast in her work to advocate for the vital resources 50,000 small and rural communities nationwide need every day,” says Eric Volk, executive director of the North Dakota Rural Water Systems Association. “As a result of her

efforts to provide safe, clean drinking water to rural citizens, President Obama signed her bipartisan legislation into law to bring Americans in rural towns and communities across our state and the country – comprising more than 90 percent of this country’s water supplies – an environmentally beneficial solution so they can access the latest technology and expertise needed to consistently bring clean drinking water into their homes and businesses.”

Heitkamp has long worked to encourage increased resources and assistance for rural areas. In November 2014, Heitkamp met with Rural Utilities Service Acting Administrator Jasper Schneider to discuss the need for targeted investments, like water infrastructure, in rural communities across the nation. On the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, Heitkamp serves as ranking member of the Senate Subcommittee on Rural Development and Energy – which oversees the Rural Utilities Service.

The 2014 Farm Bill – which Heitkamp played a leading role in writing, negotiating, and passing – places a strong emphasis on supporting rural development projects. The law authorizes programs that help upgrade and improve rural water systems, invest in expanding rural high-speed Internet, provide loans to consumers to improve energy efficiency through the new Rural Energy Savings Program, and reauthorize several other existing programs that are critical to supporting economic and community development in rural America.

NDRWSA Welcomes Executive Board of Directors

By Lisa Schatz

The North Dakota Rural Water Systems Association (NDRWSA) is a non-profit, independent corporation formed on July 9, 1974. The association is governed by eight elected officials. Every two years, an election is held for the positions of president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, director at large, and a managers' representative. At the end of a two-year term, the current president moves into the past president position. The national director's position is a three-year term. This year's election was held last month in Bismarck during the rural water annual meeting. Representation from 17 rural water systems had an opportunity to cast their votes for the 2016-2017 executive board members.

Jon Nelson was elected as the president. He and his wife, Sid, farm in the Wolford area and live in Rugby. They have three grown children. Nelson has served in a number of local community organizations and has served as a representative in the North Dakota Legislature since 1996. He has been on the All Seasons Rural Water District board since 2005.

John (Jack) Hancock was elected vice president. Hancock has been a director of the Agassiz Water Users District since 1976 and currently serves as its president. He and his wife, Brigitte, have two grown children and live just west of Gilby. Hancock is retired but continues to help his son farm.

LaVonne Althoff of rural Hankinson remains on the board as its secretary. Althoff is a current director on the Southeast Water Users District and Lake Agassiz Water Authority boards. She currently does bookkeeping for two local businesses.

Joe LaFave remains on the association's board as its treasurer. LaFave is a director of South Central Regional Water District, serving on the board since 1991. LaFave is a financial consultant living in rural Burleigh County with his wife, Donna.

John Bearman of rural Minot was elected as the director-at-large. Bearman is currently a director on North Prairie Rural Water District's board, serving since 1989. In 2012, he was elected to the National Rural Water Association's

executive board. Bearman and his wife, Tricia, have one son and one daughter. He operates an insurance agency in Minot and runs a stock farm south of Minot. He is also an auctioneer in Minot and its surrounding area.

Michele Schommer was elected as North Dakota's national director. She and her husband, Don, have three boys and farm in the Munich area where they raise wheat, canola, sunflowers, and soybeans. She is the district director for the Farm Service Agency and the vice president of the Northeast Regional Water District, as well.

Keith Nilson assumed the position of past president. He and his wife, Brenda, have four children and raise certified seed potatoes, wheat, soybeans, navy beans, pinto beans, and certified grass seed on their farm near Hoople. He also serves on the Walsh Rural Water District board as its president.

Larry Kassian was elected as the managers' representative. He has been the manager of South Central Regional Water District since September 2013. Prior to that, he was employed by Bartlett and West Engineers as a project engineer for 22 years. Kassian lives in Bismarck and is married with three kids and three grandchildren. He is also a director on the North Dakota Water Users Association board.



Back: Jack Hancock, LaVonne Althoff, Michele Schommer, Keith Nilson. **Front:** John Bearman, Joe LaFave, Jon Nelson, Larry Kassian