

WASHINGTON -- The \$1.5 billion price tag for overhauling Omaha sewers may be an intimidating figure, but it's a drop in the bucket next to a federal economic stimulus bill that could approach \$1 trillion.

Rep. Lee Terry, R-Neb., said Thursday that he's seeking to have a significant amount of stimulus funding devoted to helping cities such as Omaha that are faced with hefty bills to comply with federal clean water regulations.

"Such a burdensome cost for something as fundamental as water will exact a heavy financial toll on Omaha residents," Terry wrote in a letter to President-elect Barack Obama.

Omaha must upgrade its sewer system so that less raw sewage is dumped into local waterways.

The project is expected to take 15 to 20 years.

Given the emphasis in the stimulus debate on "shovelready" projects, Terry said, including such long-term endeavors will be a challenge.

Once the money is in place, however, the timetables for the projects could likely be moved up, Terry said.

Sen. Ben Nelson, D-Neb., supports including sewer projects in the stimulus legislation.

No one expects the federal government to cover all of the costs involved, but any help would mitigate the impact on local residents.

The current funding plan in Omaha relies on increasing sewer fees, with the average monthly fee expected to top \$50 by 2017.

