

## WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

WASHINGTON - Rural communities are casting a worried eye on the future of federal funding aimed at helping them comply with ever-tightening environmental regulations.

A spending measure that was adopted by the House last week and is now before the Senate omits language that requires the Environmental Protection Agency to direct money to rural water initiatives.

Nebraska 's three Republican House members - Adrian Smith, Jeff Fortenberry and Lee Terry - sent a letter to the EPA this week urging officials there to use money at their discretion to continue the programs.

"The rural water initiatives have been operating in Nebraska for many years and have been the main source of compliance and assistance for small rural communities struggling to meet federal water standards," the letter states.

"Because of limited local resources, any reduction in funding will place severe hardships on these communities as they implement the requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Clean Water Act."

Clancy Dempsey, executive director of the Nebraska Rural Water Association, said the loss of about \$300,000 in Nebraska would cut the nonprofit organization's programs in half.

One reason the government has seen fit to allocate that money, Dempsey said, is that small communities have been confronted with stricter federal regulations that cover, for example, naturally occurring levels of arsenic.

The water association's programs provide staff members to assist communities, free of charge, in meeting the regulations.

"It would be a large void to fill for these communities if we lost these programs," Dempsey said.

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