

March 16, 2017

NRWA statement on the President's elimination of USDA drinking water and wastewater infrastructure funding

The President's budget eliminates the USDA water and waste loan and grant program, which has been the lifeline for rural water and small communities across Rural America. Instead, the Administration is placing its confidence with the EPA State Revolving Loan Funds. This demonstrates how blind the Administration is to its rural constituency and the lack of knowledge of what is most effective in funding the majority of the nation's water and wastewater infrastructure.

There are approximately 52,000 community water supplies in the nation, of which 92% serve less than 10,000 population. In 2016, USDA Rural Utilities Service dedicated their funding exclusively to Rural America - 85% of projects were for small communities, with populations of 5,000 or less. The USDA Water and Environmental Program is a vital lifeline for rural residents funding the water infrastructure we rely on today.

We support the President's call for increased investments to address aging and dilapidated infrastructure. However, this proposal guts the USDA infrastructure budget which has funded rural infrastructure for the past 70 years. USDA has the only water infrastructure programs specifically targeted to rural populations.

Private financing is not the solution and does not provide affordable terms for rural communities. Rural areas include lower-income, working class families with higher populations of retired residents and veterans on fixed incomes. This budget will not work for these rural Americans.

Shifting the federal portion of available financing to the EPA is unworkable, when data documents approximately 75% of SRF funding goes to systems serving over 10,000 population.

If the President is serious about assisting small and rural communities with infrastructure funding, he should utilize the USDA water programs that have a proven record in effectively and efficiently serving Rural America.

The National Rural Water Association is the largest water utility organization in the nation, with over 31,000 members. NRWA members provide safe and affordable water and wastewater services to over 34 million Americans in rural areas.