

Rep. Otter's Bill Promotes Community Choice in Their Health Policy

(Washington, D.C.) Small community consumers would be given more control of public health policy under Rep. Otter's bill, H.R. 4717, introduced with eight cosponsors on June 25th. The bill allows small communities more say in how they comply with the EPA drinking water regulation for arsenic and other naturally-occurring drinking water substances.

The U.S. EPA finalized the arsenic rule in January 2001. The rule has been widely viewed as unfair in the way it regulates small communities and is likely to do more harm than good, or cause unintended consequences, in many small communities according to consumer advocates. The EPA rule establishes a uniform technology driven standard and fines communities for non-compliance regardless of local impacts.

Mike Keegan, analyst with the National Rural Water Association said, *"The bill allows small communities to adopt an alternative locally supported public health policy as an alternative to the one prescribed from Washington. If the community believes their policy is more progressive and protective of public health – under Congressman Otter's bill they are allowed to adopt their own plan. It changes the current process, which allows EPA to overrule the local will. In many communities, EPA's rule will more than doubled water rates on low-income families without improving the quality of their water in any appreciative manner. Low-income families stand to benefit the most from Mr. Otter's legislation because the costs of EPA's mandate would force them to tradeoff paying for medical attention, housing, food, etc. Consumer advocates have been documenting the harm caused by unnecessarily increasing utility rates on low-income families."*

To educate communities and consumers on the issue, NRWA has published a public information homepage (www.ruralwater.org/arsenic), which includes the following materials.

- Congressman Otter's legislation, H.R. 4717
- Communities Impacted by EPA's Arsenic Rule
- EPA's Arsenic Rule
- Examples of Hardship in Specific Communities
- Letter of Leading Scientists to EPA Identifying Flawed Analysis in the Rule
- Consumer Advocate Studies Detailing Harmful Impacts on Low-Income Consumers
- A Fact Sheet Identifying Unfair Aspects of Rule on Small Communities