

## *Senators Inhofe, Nelson, and Hagel Lauded for Standing up for Small and Rural Communities and Advancing Clean & Safe Water*

(Washington, DC) The **National Rural Water Association (NRWA)**, a nonprofit, **community-based environmental organization of over 27,000 rural and small communities** thanks Senators Inhofe, Nelson, and Hagel for their efforts to help small communities provide safe drinking water and comply with federal water regulations. The three Senators are the original sponsors of S. 2509, “The Small Systems Safe Drinking Water Act of 2007,” introduced today.

The legislation will enhance public health, especially in low-income communities by allowing for the use of the Safe Drinking Water Act’s (SDWA) affordability and variance provisions. Senator Inhofe’s bill mandates that – for standards that are driven by cost (economics) – be no more expensive in rural and small communities, than in large communities. It brings equity and fairness to the law’s implementation for small towns. It corrects the status quo, where thousands of small and rural water communities are forced to spend limited public funds for compliance when there is not an identified public health risk from non-compliance. It also places a prohibition on fining small communities for not having the funding to comply with regulations that are not based on public, but rather on large community economics. We should not be fining small communities, especially low-income communities, because they don’t have the funds to comply with uniform regulations that are not necessary for public health protection.

Currently, small communities are prohibited from utilizing economical treatment options (the so-called small system variance technologies), under the Safe Drinking Water Act because EPA adopted a policy that families can afford annual water rates of 2.5% of median household income (MHI) (or approximately \$1,200 per household). EPA’s MHI standard does not consider the quantity, concentration, rural demographics, and financial abilities of low-income families or disadvantaged populations to afford the rule as required by the Agency’s Environmental Justice policy [Executive Order 12898].

Without passage of the Inhofe bill, thousands of small communities will be out of compliance with the arsenic and disinfection by-products rules – without the opportunity to utilize the law’s affordable variance provision. Low-income communities will be the most severely impacted.

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