

Statement of the Honorable Jerry Moran  
Representative in Congress from the State of Kansas  
Testimony before the Subcommittee on Water and Power  
of the House Committee on Resources

December 7, 2005

For Consideration of H.R. 4000, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to revise certain repayment contracts with several irrigation districts in Kansas and Nebraska.

Chairman and Ranking Member, good morning. Thank you for allowing me to testify today. Thank you also for expediting this legislation to the hearing process. I would also like to thank the Bureau of Reclamation for their cooperation with my office and the irrigation districts. The timing of this legislation is indeed significant as farmers in Kansas and Nebraska are struggling to survive the financial hardship that five years of drought has brought the region. The efforts of you and your staff to bring this bill forward are appreciated not only by me, but by the producers I represent today.

Mr. Chairman today I wish to highlight the need for this legislation. H.R.4000 modifies the payment contracts between the Bureau of Reclamation and Kansas Bostwick Irrigation District No. 2, the Bostwick Irrigation District of Nebraska, the French-Cambridge Irrigation District, and the Webster Irrigation District No. 4 which are all part of the Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program. To develop this legislation, I have worked closely with Kenneth Nelson, Chairman of the Irrigation Project Reauthorization Council. Unfortunately, due to budget conditions within these districts his travel to D.C. could not be arranged.

The bill H.R.4000, which I introduced with Congressman Osborne, authorizes the Bureau of Reclamation to extend the repayment period for the distribution works payments for these four irrigation districts. Irrigators in the Tom Green irrigation project in Texas received similar relief with a 2004 law that extended the repayment period by 10 years in that district.

Currently, these irrigation districts make two types of payments to the Bureau of Reclamation and two reserves account payments. The water supply works payment is used to recuperate the construction cost of the reservoir structures. These payments have an ending date of between 2040 and 2042. The distribution works payments are paid to cover the cost of water delivery infrastructure including canals. Under the current contracts these payments will be made until 2009 to 2015 depending on the contract. The two reserve funds include the water supply reserve fund and the distribution works reserve fund. Irrigators make payments within these funds to cover long-term improvements and rehabilitation and these funds are collected and managed by the irrigation districts.

This legislation would essentially extend the payment periods for distribution works payments to the same length of time as the water supply works payments, which would retain their exiting payment period. This extension would yield the Bureau of Reclamation the same number of dollars. However, because the distribution works payments would be made over a longer period of time, the effective annual payment would be reduced.

Mr. Chairman, farmers in these irrigation districts have been paying for water they have not been receiving. The base irrigation volume is supposed to be around 15 inches. Two of the districts have not received any water and the other two have received only very limited amounts. The drought and its effect on agriculture production have many producers struggling to not only to pay irrigation fees but feed their own families. To show the human side of this story I thought it appropriate to read the following producer letter.

To Congressman Jerry Moran:

Dear Sir:

Hi my name is Monty Dahl and I would like to talk to you about getting some drought relief from repayment to the Bureau of Reclamation.

I'm a 37 years old and I have four young kids and a wonderful stay at home mom to raise them. I graduated from K-State in 1992 and chose to return to the family farm with my dad. In 1997 after my father passed away I took over the family farm.

The reason for this letter is concern about the repayment to the bureau for irrigation water not received in the last two years because of drought. The last two years there has been no release from Harlan County reservoir to the irrigators of Kansas Bostwick Irrigation district No. 2. This makes a hardship for we have invested heavily in our future for conservation by switching 90% of our flood irrigation land to pivots. The pivots raise our water use efficiency from 55 to 80-85% so for conserving water this is a good investment. However the total cost of a pivot system for a typical quarter section will range from 40 to 50 thousand, so you can see it is no small investment.

I'm writing this letter, we would like some help on the delay of the repayment of payments to the Bureau of Reclamation. Because, due to the drought, we have not received any deliveries for two years, and our yields have went gone from irrigation yields to dry land yields. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely Monty Dahl

Chairman and Ranking Member, thank you again for allowing me to testify. The time is now to move H.R.4000 and provide Mr. Dahl and his neighbors' farms the assistance they desperately need.