

Senator Max Baucus, Montana
U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
On Authorized Rural Water Projects Completion Act - S. 3385
Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

July 31, 2012

Chairman Bingaman,

Thank you for holding this important hearing today on our bill, the Authorized Rural Water Projects Completion Act. And thank you for your outstanding leadership to find solutions for rural Americans who still lack good clean water.

As Ben Franklin said long ago, “When the well is dry, we learn the worth of water.”

Most Americans are lucky. They connect to city water systems that don’t run dry.

But in rural Montana, we know the worth of water. The wells are dry. The wells are old. And they are salty, contaminated, and expensive.

Today in eastern Montana, an oil boom is challenging small towns that barely meet their own water needs. Rural water projects like Fort Peck-Dry Prairie provide a basic service. They are a good investment.

That project is now providing clean water to oilfield workers who have moved to the small town of Bainville. At the same time, the project is meeting our tribal trust responsibility.

My bill will ensure that the Bureau of Reclamation program that provides potable water to rural Americans is a wise investment. At the current rate of appropriations, it will be twice as expensive as it should be to pay for projects like Rocky’s Boy-North Central and Dry Redwater.

We can do better.

We don’t have extra money floating around this place. We need to spend it on essentials. And clean drinking water is an essential.

I am so pleased to introduce my good friend Chairman Bruce Sunchild to testify today.

Chairman Sunchild has been a leader of the Chippewa Cree tribe for decades. His homeland in north central Montana is a beautiful stretch of the Great Plains. He speaks movingly about the unsanitary groundwater wells that his people continue to use.

I urge you to listen closely to his wisdom. Thank you again.

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