



N.M. included in federal infrastructure campaign

OHKAY OWINGEH, N.M.—During a tour of Ohkay Owingeh with Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez, D-N.M., on July 7, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack announced a \$1.6 million grant and a \$610,000 loan to build a wastewater treatment plant on Pueblo lands in Rio Arriba County.

This project is designed to help expand water treatment from 235,000 to 350,000 gallons per day and extend services to Pueblo residents who are not currently connected. These improvements are expected to benefit 1,143 residents.

Leger Fernandez expressed her support of the plan in comments about the needs faced by Tribal nations and people in the Southwest.

“The COVID pandemic showed the world what our Native American communities have known for too long—their communities struggle to gain access to clean water,” she pointed out. “It’s simply unacceptable that 1 in 10 Indigenous Americans don’t have access to safe tap water or basic sanitation.

“Our government’s failure to properly invest in Tribal communities proved to be deadly during the pandemic. The Navajo Nation was one of the hardest-hit communities in our country and we

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may never know exactly how many of our Native American brothers and sisters died from the pandemic,” she said.

The funds for building a wastewater treatment plant is only one part of the infrastructure improvements package crafted for 34 states and Puerto Rico that will total \$307 million to modernize rural drinking water and wastewater infrastructure.

Leger Fernandez said the focus needs to be placed on creating healthy populations and rural and Tribal communities have long been left behind.

“It’s time to keep our promise and invest in rural water and wastewater infrastructure,” she said. “The American Jobs Plan does just that and after speaking with Secretary Vilsack, I know that this will be a priority for the Department of Agriculture and the Administration.

“I look forward to continuing to work with him to deliver these funds to our local communities in McKinley County and beyond,” she concluded.

These investments follow President Biden’s announcement last week of a Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework that will make the largest investment in clean drinking water in American history. It will replace all of the nation’s lead pipes and service lines, and help address barriers faced by communities of color, Tribal communities and people who live in rural America.

The other states benefiting from this investment include Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, North Dakota, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin, and West Virginia.