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news release

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DE LA GARZA CALLS FOR FULL EPA GRANT FUNDING FOR COLONIAS

For immediate release, Friday, June 24, 1994

WASHINGTON -- Seventeen lawmakers from Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California, led by Rep. Kika de la Garza, D-Texas, are urging the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to modify its proposal that state governments provide 50 percent of the funding for colonia water and wastewater projects in order to receive EPA grant assistance.

In a letter to EPA Administrator Carol M. Browner, Rep. de la Garza and the other lawmakers said the 50-percent match requirement proposed by EPA in legislation to establish a special colonia assistance program "would make it difficult for recipient states to use the funds made available for this program."

Instead, the lawmakers urged EPA to model its program after a rural water program for colonias authored by Rep. de la Garza and administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Under the USDA program, water and wastewater entities seeking to serve eligible colonias in rural areas can receive full grant funding (with no state match requirement) to construct facilities, lay pipes and install interior plumbing.

"When Congress approved the special USDA colonias program as part of the 1990 Farm Bill, Congress looked at the option of making it subject to matching funds. Due to the grave living conditions, and considering the fact that these communities are the most impoverished in our Nation, Congress decided that colonias would be better served through a 100 percent grant program," said the lawmakers' letter.

Rep. de la Garza and the other lawmakers are seeking passage of legislation to authorize an EPA colonia program in order to secure \$60 million in funding previously approved by Congress. The \$60 million appropriation for colonias was included in last year's EPA annual funding bill, but made contingent on enactment of specific authorization bill by the end of September 1994.

"It is critical that we reach a compromise on this issue in order to get this legislation through Congress as soon as possible. We therefore hope that your agency will reconsider its position on this important issue," said the lawmakers' letter.

In addition to Rep. de la Garza, other co-signers of the letter to EPA's Browner are: Senators Dennis DeConcini, D-Ariz.; and Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M.; Reps. Henry Bonilla, R-Texas; Henry B. Gonzalez, D-Texas; Gene Green, D-Texas; Ralph M. Hall, D-Texas; Solomon P. Ortiz, D-Texas; Bill Sarpalius, D-Texas; Charles W. Stenholm, D-Texas; Frank Tejeda, D-Texas; Charles Wilson, D-Texas; Jim Chapman, D-Texas; Mike Andrews, D-Texas; Joe Skeen, R-N.M.; Randy "Duke" Cunningham, R-Calif.; and Ed Pastor, D-Ariz.

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