



# WESTERN GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

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September 21, 2004

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Chairman  
Senate Appropriations  
Subcommittee  
on Homeland Security  
SD-135 DSOB  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd  
Ranking  
Senate Appropriations  
Subcommittee  
on Homeland Security  
SD-135 DSOB  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harold Rogers  
Chairman  
House Appropriation Subcommittee  
on Homeland Security  
B-307 RHOB  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Martin Sabo  
Ranking  
House Appropriation Subcommittee  
on Homeland Security  
B-307 RHOB  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Cochran and Senator Byrd & Chairman Rogers and Representative Sabo:

The Western Governors urge you to consider taking an important and proactive step to help mitigate the economic impacts of the ongoing drought. Specifically, we ask you to include the provisions of the National Drought Preparedness Act (S. 1454, H.R. 2871) in the conference report accompanying H.R. 4567, the Homeland Security Appropriations Bill.

A national drought policy is urgently needed to move the country away from costly, ad-hoc emergency relief and toward a coordinated approach that emphasizes preparedness and cost-reduction. We simply cannot afford to wait any longer. The economic costs of drought to private entities as well as governments at the federal, state, and local level have been staggering. You are currently considering a \$3 billion aid package that would provide relief for crop and livestock losses. In 2002, Congress passed a similar \$3.1 billion aid package. However, this emergency spending is just the tip of the iceberg. It does not include significant other costs caused by the drought such as an increase in the number and intensity of wildfires, and a reduction in the availability of low-cost power from hydroelectric dams. Billions of dollars are being spent every year to deal with the impacts of drought yet we have no national policy in place to proactively plan for and mitigate the impacts of drought.

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
The Honorable Robert Byrd  
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September 21, 2004  
Page 2

The National Drought Preparedness Act would establish a National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS), a vastly improved drought monitoring and forecasting system. As with other acts of nature, preparation can be the key to lessening the impacts of drought. Tools like NIDIS can be used to alert us to potential drought situations early enough to allow us to make better mitigation decisions. The NIDIS will provide water users across the board – farmers, ranchers, tribes, land managers, business owners, recreationalists, wildlife managers, and decision makers at all levels of government – with the ability to assess their drought risk in real time, before the onset, and during drought.

The legislation would also create a National Drought Council to coordinate and integrate federal drought assistance programs. The advantage of this one-stop-shopping approach is it would encourage drought preparedness planning at all levels of government, and as droughts emerge, would focus federal funding on the implementation of the preparedness plans to proactively minimize the drought's impacts.

Ultimately, we believe that the enactment of the Drought Preparedness Act would move the country toward a proactive approach that will minimize the damage caused by future droughts, thereby saving taxpayers money. For example, flooding would cause much more damage if we had not spent billions on identifying flood plains and in building levies and other structures to protect communities. The same could be said of other natural disasters such as wildfires. Drought is no different, except that the damage caused is often far costlier than other natural disasters.

Nineteen Senators and forty-five House members from twenty-nine different states have cosponsored this legislation. In addition, the National Drought Preparedness Act has been endorsed by the following groups:

Western Governors' Association	Southern Governors' Association
National Emergency Management Association	National Association of Conservation Districts
National Farm Credit Council	International Commission on Water Policy
National Association of State Foresters	Council of State Governments – West
Western Business Roundtable	National Drought Mitigation Center
American Council of Engineering Companies	American Association of State Climatologists
Ohio River Basin Commission	National Association of Counties
American Farm Bureau Federation	American Sugarbeet Growers Association
National Association of Wheat Growers	National Cattlemen's Beef Association
Western States Water Council	

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
The Honorable Robert Byrd  
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September 21, 2004  
Page 3

We urge you to act on this very crucial bill. We have attached a Western Drought Facts and Information sheet for your reference. If you have any questions, please contact the WGA staff: Kevin Moran at 202-624-5402 or Shaun McGrath at 303-623-9378. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



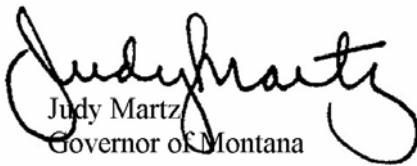
Mike Johanns  
Governor of Nebraska

WGA Lead Governor for Drought



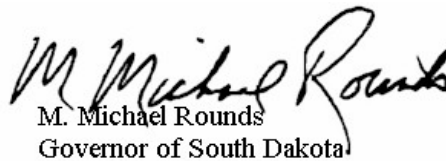
Bill Richardson  
Governor of New Mexico

WGA Lead Governor for Drought



Judy Martz  
Governor of Montana

WGA Lead Governor for Drought



M. Michael Rounds  
Governor of South Dakota

WGA Led Governor for Drought

cc: Members of the Conference Committee on H.R. 4567 Homeland Security  
Appropriations Bill  
Sponsors of the National Drought Preparedness Act of 2003  
Western States Senate Coalition  
House Western Caucus