

Utah water officials praise new bill

Infrastructure bill puts \$40M toward finishing plumbing system needed to distribute CUP water.

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Spanish Fork • Along the face of Utah’s Loafer Mountain, a deep trench is being cut from the mouth of Spanish Fork Canyon to Santaquin to lay a 60-inch pipe that will deliver Colorado River Basin water to south Utah County residents.



Utah’s Sen. Mitt Romney toured the construction area Friday to look at what Congress’s recently passed infrastructure bill is helping fund.

“Two-thirds of the growth in Utah over the last decade was people being born and raised here. We grow in part because people who are born here want to live here,” the Republican senator said at a news conference on a quiet country lane running alongside verdant agricultural fields that will someday be sprawling subdivisions. “And so part of our job as elected officials is to make this a place where people can live and establish their families and get jobs.”

And that means investing in costly water projects, like the Central Utah Project (CUP) completion, he said. Several Utah water officials and locally elected leaders joined Romney to extol the bipartisan spending bill’s benefits for Utah infrastructure, especially the conduits that deliver water to taps. In addition to the \$3 billion for Utah roads, the bill designates \$40 million toward completing the plumbing system needed to distribute CUP water to various cities. Another \$10 million will go toward the federal agency spearheading projects to fix environmental damage resulting from the CUP. It also sets aside \$214 million to develop a water system on the Navajo Reservation and another \$219 million toward loan programs to help Utah

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GENE SHAWCROFT | General manager of the Central Utah Water Conservancy District municipalities provide drinking water.

“Our communities are growing quickly, and completion of the [CUP] system will provide for the increasing water demand,” said Gene Shawcroft, general manager of the Central Utah Water Conservancy District. “Also, the funding for the Navajo Utah water rights settlement is crucial to the state of Utah to secure our Colorado River water and, more importantly, deliver clean drinking water to many in the Navajo

Nation who currently don’t have running water.”

These projects, however, increase the demands on the already depleted Colorado River, whose flows have steadily declined in recent decades.

Not present at Friday’s event were Romney’s fellow Republicans, Reps. John Curtis and Burgess Owens, whose districts cover the communities served by the CUP. Like the rest of Utah’s congressional delegation, they voted against the \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill, with Owens denouncing the legislation that Romney helped assemble as “Democrats’ socialist tax-and-spend package.”

“As one of the most expensive spending packages ever to be considered before Congress, this bill will place a staggering debt on the next generation of Americans, increase inflation, and leave our economy worse off,” Owens said in a Nov. 5 statement.

However, some elected Utah County leaders are quite happy Congress is investing more federal dollars to complete the CUP, which carries water from the Colorado Basin through the mountains to feed growing Wasatch Front cities from Santaquin to Magna.

“Our city can’t grow without water,” said Spanish Fork’s outgoing Mayor Steve Leifson. “We love knowing that we have water for our residents. And we know we have water for future growth because as we continue to grow, the demand for water is going to keep increasing, and we need to have it.”

The pipeline currently under construction is part of a \$150 million 17-mile network running south from Spanish Fork Canyon. It will receive half the 102,000 acre-feet of water the project will carry through a tunnel from Strawberry Reservoir. The other half will go north through pipes that are already in place.