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Infrastructure upgrade — Clean water essential in McDowell

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Infrastructure upgrade

Clean water essential in McDowell

The recent award of \$1.8 million for a key infrastructure upgrade in McDowell County is long overdue. The award of a \$500,000 loan and a \$1,311,800 grant by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development agency to the McDowell County Public Service District will allow for the start of construction on phase two of a large-scale water project for the Iaeger area.

The project will extend water lines from an existing water treatment facility in Coalwood to the town of Iaeger, as well as the Harmon Branch, Clear Fork Junction and Wilmore communities.

Hundreds of customers in the communities will be served by the project. The new water system also will help to address health concerns associated with possible barium contamination.

Phase one of the project is complete. The \$1.8 million funding award will allow officials to begin construction soon on phase two, according to McDowell County Public Service District General Manager Mavis Brewster.

McDowell County has long lagged behind much of the Mountain State in development of modern infrastructure. Many communities in McDowell County are still lacking modern sewage treatment facilities, and the county still doesn't have a four-lane highway. Yes, a small segment of the Coalfields Expressway was completed near Welch several years ago. But the road is non-paved, and isn't open to traffic. Meanwhile, a segment of the Coalfields Expressway in neighboring Raleigh County is usable, and open to traffic.

The start of construction on the phase two water project in Iaeger is another big step in the right direction for McDowell County. The continued development of the Indian Ridge Industrial Park in Welch, and the \$232 million federal prison project, also will go a long way toward the development of new infrastructure.

New roads are necessary to reach the federal prison. That includes the long-planned interchange of the Coalfields Expressway and the King Coal Highway in Welch.

A new housing development also is planned on Tom's Mountain near Welch to accommodate a projected housing need once the federal prison is opened. The city of Welch also continues to

make strides in meeting a decades old federal mandate for a long-planned sewer upgrade. The city has been under the federal consent decree since the early 1980s.

Clean drinking water is absolutely vital to all citizens. In the year 2008, it is difficult to conceive why small communities across southern West Virginia are still struggling without a safe and reliable source of water. When health is further threatened by water quality concerns, the need becomes even more urgent for area families.

We once again call on all local, state and federal officials to work expeditiously to correct the many infrastructure woes faced by McDowell County.

The phase two water project in Iaeger is an important start. But there is much work to be done.