

Congressman Dan Newhouse: An Advocate for Irrigated Agriculture in Central Washington and Beyond



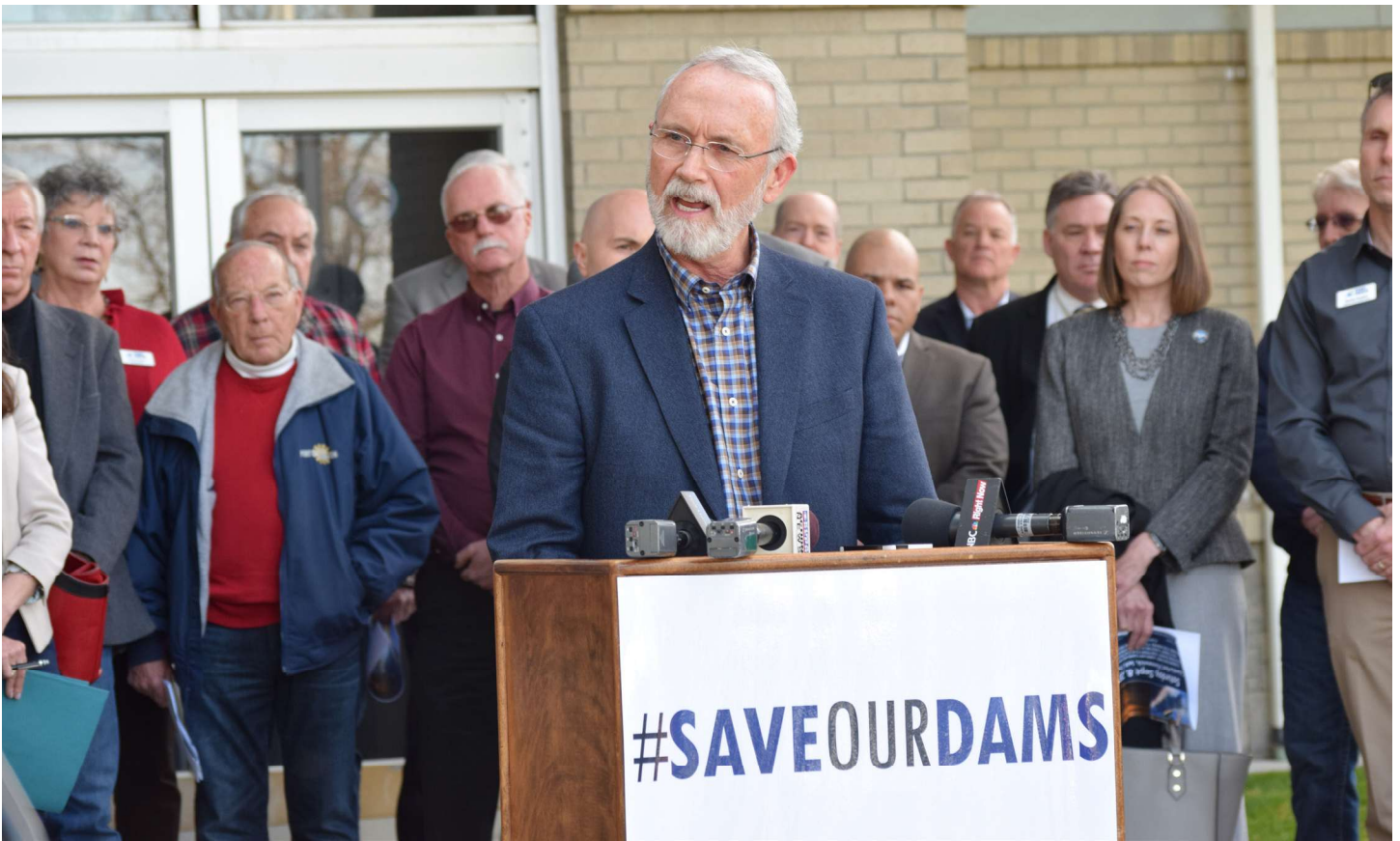
Lieutenant Colonel Christian Dietz of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Walla Walla District and Congressman Dan Newhouse overlook the Snake River and the Ice Harbor Lock and Dam after touring its newly installed high-tech turbine.

Congressman Dan Newhouse (R-WA) represents Washington's 4th District in the U.S. House of Representatives. A lifelong resident of central Washington, Congressman Newhouse served four terms in the Washington State House of Representatives and was the director of Washington State's Department of Agriculture from 2009 to 2013 before being elected to his position in Washington, DC. He is a member of the House Appropriations Committee and serves on three subcommittees, including the Energy and Water Subcommittee. In this interview, Congressman Newhouse tells Irrigation Leader about his work to support irrigated agriculture in Washington and across the West and the outlook on federal support for irrigation infrastructure in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic.

Irrigation Leader: Congressman, please tell us about your background and committee assignments in Congress.

Dan Newhouse: I grew up on a farm in Sunnyside, Washington, where my son Devon and his wife, Halley, still operate Newhouse Farms. Our farm is about 850 acres, with hops as our main commodity. We also grow tree fruit and wine grapes and raise bison.

Before being elected to Congress, I served in the Washington State House of Representatives and then as director of the Washington State Department of Agriculture under Governor Christine Gregoire, a Democrat. She trusted my knowledge and expertise to help Washington's farmers grow, harvest, and market their crops throughout



Congressman Newhouse is flanked by community advocates, agriculture representatives, and business leaders at a press conference at the Benton Public Utility District in Kennewick, Washington.

the country and across the globe, which proves to me that agriculture is truly an industry with bipartisan support. Our farmers and ranchers work hard every day to produce food that feeds our families. But in areas across the country like central Washington, they wouldn't be able to do so without significant water supply and irrigation infrastructure.

Having previously served on the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committees, I am now a member of the House Appropriations Committee, where I serve on three subcommittees, including the Energy and Water Subcommittee. The Energy and Water Subcommittee has jurisdiction over the Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, providing me a key opportunity to shape funding streams for federal water infrastructure. This infrastructure is critical to my home district in central Washington and other rural communities in the West and across the country. We also have jurisdiction over the U.S. Department of Energy and Power Market Administrations, including the Bonneville Power Administration, which enables me to continue to prioritize federal hydropower projects like Grand Coulee Dam, the largest power-producing dam in the country, and the dozens of other dams in Washington State.

Irrigation Leader: Given your interest in irrigation, agriculture, and western policies in general, what steps are you taking to be more involved?

Dan Newhouse: I serve as an executive vice chairman of the Congressional Western Caucus, a bipartisan group of representatives from across the West and beyond. We focus on raising policy issues that benefit rural communities, from public lands access and forestry management to energy independence and, of course, water infrastructure development.

As members of the Western Caucus, we each bring perspectives from across the country to solve the challenges facing our rural districts. In so many ways, the priorities of the caucus align perfectly with the priorities of central Washington. Within the caucus, we are able to collaborate and amplify the efforts of our colleagues through a united platform, which in turn helps deliver results for our constituents.

Last year, I introduced the Water Supply Infrastructure Revitalization and Utilization Act with the support of my Western Caucus colleagues. The legislation allows local water managers and operators to maintain and update Reclamation water supply infrastructure, much of which is over a century old. Our farms and rural communities in the West were built on this critical infrastructure, and by introducing this legislation, I want to make sure that we can repair and rebuild these structures to work efficiently for future generations.

Irrigation Leader: What role do you see for irrigation infrastructure in the COVID-19-related economic stimulus funding packages that are being discussed?

Dan Newhouse: My colleague Rep. Jim Costa (D-CA) and I have led the effort to highlight the importance of including water and irrigation infrastructure in any infrastructure package that comes before Congress. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were discussions about a comprehensive infrastructure package to revitalize our nation's crumbling roads and bridges. We would be remiss to exclude water infrastructure from this legislation.

In May 2019, we organized a letter to the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee that garnered support from more than 50 of our colleagues from both parties. As talk of a COVID-19 infrastructure package surfaced, we again raised this priority with House leadership. Members from across the country and both sides of the aisle recognize the importance of maintaining and updating our water infrastructure, not only for our rural and agricultural communities, but also for cities, towns, and municipalities.

I am optimistic that we will see an infrastructure package as our nation continues to rebuild from this global pandemic, and with a strong showing of bipartisan support, I am hopeful that water and irrigation infrastructure will be included.

Irrigation Leader: Should there be a dedicated funding source or federal loan guarantee program for irrigation districts?

Dan Newhouse: Congress has a responsibility to maintain the federal water infrastructure that serves as the backbone of rural agricultural economies in the West. Through annual appropriations, Congress provides limited funding for the operation, maintenance, and replacement (OM&R) of Reclamation projects; however, we all know that irrigation districts are facing significant capital costs and are often responsible for the OM&R of federal water resources projects, too. That is why I have strongly supported programs to provide low-cost federal financing for water

infrastructure projects through direct loans and loan guarantees. Recently, there have been efforts to limit the ability of irrigation districts to seek this assistance for capital projects involving federal infrastructure. I will continue to be a steadfast proponent of ensuring that irrigation districts can continue to take full advantage of these programs and maximizing resources for programs that help irrigation districts maintain critical infrastructure.

Irrigation Leader: What are your thoughts regarding the title transfer of Reclamation projects?

Dan Newhouse: As I mentioned, many of our communities rely heavily on Reclamation infrastructure. In some cases, the bureaucratic nature of western water supply and delivery can infringe upon a community's ability to effectively operate and maintain these infrastructure projects. I believe local water managers and operators are willing and able to manage, maintain, and improve our existing infrastructure if given the chance.

I was proud to stand in the Oval Office with President Trump when he signed the public lands package into law last year. Not only did this package include my legislation to authorize the next phase of the Yakima Basin Project—a vital next step for water supply reliability in the region—but it also included a provision for local irrigation districts to more easily petition for local control and management of these projects. I have been working with Kennewick Irrigation District (KID), which I proudly represent, on a title transfer of Reclamation land and projects for quite some time. I introduced legislation that passed unanimously in the U.S. House of Representatives to finally give KID the ability to locally and responsively manage the projects for water users within the district.

This legislation was also included in my friend Rep. Tom McClintock's (R-CA) Water Optimization for



Congressman Newhouse (R-WA) joins President Trump in the Oval Office for the signing of S.47, the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act, a package of legislation affecting public lands across the United States that includes Congressman Newhouse's legislation to authorize the next phase of the Yakima Basin Project.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SHEALAH CRAIGHEAD.



Michael Crowder (left), the president-elect of the National Association of Conservation Districts and the general manager of Barker Ranch, provides a tour of the Barker Ranch water delivery and automation system in West Richland, Washington, for U.S. Department of Agriculture Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation Bill Northey (center) and Congressman Newhouse (right).



Members of Congress Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA), Doug Lamborn (R-CO), and Dan Newhouse hold a House Natural Resources Committee field hearing in Pasco, Washington, on the Federal Columbia River Power System.



Farmers, elected officials, and staff of the Roza Irrigation District join Congressman Dan Newhouse for the unveiling of the Water Supply Infrastructure Rehabilitation and Utilization Act in Sunnyside, Washington.

the West (WOW) Act, which we introduced this Congress. Congressman McClintock is the ranking member of the House Natural Resources Water Subcommittee, and he knows western water challenges all too well. The WOW Act aims to streamline the operation of federal water projects, increase local management, and improve water reliability for communities throughout the West. Beyond the KID transfer, the bill also removes duplicative and burdensome regulations that prevent effective water storage and delivery fulfillment.

Irrigation Leader: What should every farmer, irrigation district general manager, and district board member know about you?

Dan Newhouse: Hailing from the beautiful and agriculturally diverse Yakima Valley, I fully understand the challenges facing our farmers and rural communities when it comes to water storage and delivery. Irrigation infrastructure

is critical to our way of life in central Washington and in many other communities across the West. Without it, our communities and the agriculture industry as we know it would not exist.

I will continue to advocate for strong, efficient, and well-managed water infrastructure through my service in the U.S. House of Representatives, my assignment to the House Appropriations Committee, and in my role in the Congressional Western Caucus. [IL](#)



Dan Newhouse represents Washington's 4th District in the U.S. House of Representatives. For more information, visit newhouse.house.gov.