



June 12, 2010

Local earmark requests a lengthy list

Millions sought for roads, Guard center

By Mark Fischenich
Free Press Staff Writer

MANKATO — The three people representing southern Minnesota in Congress are united in seeking \$1 million to upgrade Mankato's Madison Avenue and \$2 million to promote health care in New Ulm.

The trio of Democrats — Rep. Tim Walz and Sens. Amy Klobuchar and Al Franken — are also on the same page in seeking earmarks of more than \$10 million for upgrading Highway 14 and around \$9 million for a new Mankato-based National Guard maintenance facility.

All three will also be working to get several other local projects included in federal appropriations bills, namely funds to develop a multi-county transit system in the Mankato area and money for Minnesota State University's renewable energy institute.

In other cases, local requests for federal funds will be relying on the persuasive powers of one or two of the three lawmakers.

Congressional staffers say that support from both senators and the representative is helpful in getting projects included in appropriations bills as thousands of requests from around the country are pared down in committees. If a project is funded at the same level in both the Senate and House bills, it has a strong chance of being in the final conference committee bill, they said.

In contrast, an appropriation in one bill that is without a counterpart in the other bill is likely to be reduced by the conference committee.

"We always encourage our applicants to request from both senators as well," said Walz press secretary Sara Severs. "Just showing that extra support is helpful."

The long lists of earmark requests are available on the websites of Klobuchar, Franken and Walz — part of a congressional effort to bring more transparency to the sometimes-controversial process of directing funds to individual projects in the home states of lawmakers.

Each is seeking \$1 million to help Mankato finance a complete overhaul of most of Madison Avenue. The project covers the commercial thoroughfare from North Seventh Street near the base of the Madison Avenue hill to Blue Earth County Road 12 on the far eastern edge

of the city.

There's also consensus on seeking \$2 million for The Heart of New Ulm project, an initiative of the New Ulm Medical Center and its owner, Minneapolis-based Allina Health System. The pilot project aims to reduce heart attacks in New Ulm through a variety of tactics ranging from improved preventative health care services to changing the exercise and eating habits of residents.

Walz, Klobuchar and Franken are seeking approximately \$9 million for the field maintenance facility proposed to be built adjacent to the Army National Guard Training and Community Center on the east side of Mankato. The facility would provide maintenance for 445 vehicles and other equipment assigned to 11 southern Minnesota Guard units.

All three requested funds for various parts of the long-term effort to turn Highway 14 into a four-lane expressway between Rochester and New Ulm, although the amount requested isn't identical in every case. Walz asked for \$3.6 million for a new interchange with County Road 12 in Mankato, along with related road work. Franken put in a request for \$2 million, and Klobuchar asked for \$1 million.

The lawmakers are in agreement in seeking \$4 million for a similar interchange project in North Mankato at Highway 14 and Rockford Road (Nicollet County Road 41). And the trio is also unanimous in looking for \$3 million for converting the last stretch of two-lane between Owatonna and Rochester — from just east of Owatonna to west of Dodge Center — to four-lane.

There's also unanimity in seeking \$3 million for right-of-way purchases and development of Highway 14 between North Mankato and New Ulm. As with all the Highway 14 projects, the requested funding is only a small piece of what will be needed to ultimately finish the work — which will cost hundreds of millions of dollars.

Walz (\$69,000), Franken (\$65,000) and Klobuchar (\$50,000) are each requesting planning and development funds for a proposed four-county transit system that would include Blue Earth, Le Sueur, Nicollet and Waseca counties.

There's also disagreement on how much to seek for MSU's International Renewable Energy Technology Institute, which attempts to help businesses bring green energy products to the marketplace. Klobuchar and Walz are looking for \$3 million and Franken is asking for \$1 million.

On other area projects, just one or two of the lawmakers are pushing for funds. Walz and Klobuchar are looking for \$1.5 million for a transportation research, implementation and training center at MSU. Klobuchar alone is asking for \$100,000 for MSU to create a "modeling, simulation and visualization research center" that would aim to help business, industry and government predict future trends and increase planning, according to the senator's summary of the earmark.

Walz joins Klobuchar in seeking nearly \$1.4 million for Mankato to improve the safety of railroad crossings in the city. Klobuchar is on her own in looking for nearly \$80,000 to help Sleepy Eye upgrade its law enforcement communications system and \$500,000 for Winnebago for road reconstruction projects.

The two senators are asking for either \$500,000 (Klobuchar) or \$1 million (Franken) to help Le Sueur finance an intersection on Highway 169 serving the city's new industrial park. Rep. John Kline, a Republican who represents Le Sueur, is philosophically opposed to earmarks and no longer requests any for his district.

Walz and Franken are requesting \$2 million to continue the upgrade of the Minnesota Valley Regional Railroad, a county-owned rail line that serves farmers and industry in Sibley County and several other western Minnesota counties.

The Free Press, Mankato, MN 418 South Second Street Mankato, MN 56001