WASHINGTON, D.C. — Reaffirming his commitment to "preserve and protect" the Town of Olathe's water supply, U.S. Sen. Bill Armstrong (R-Colo.) today urged a Senate subcommittee to act promptly on his bill to remove a legal technicality that is keeping the Town from modernizing its water system.

Armstrong, in a statement to the Public Lands and Reserved Water Subcommittee of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, explained the "paradox" the Town faces. The water system was built on land obtained from the federal government in 1919, but the agreement provided that Olathe could not re-sell the land.

According to Armstrong, this provision also acts as an unintended prohibition against using the land as collateral for a loan to repair and update the Town's water system.

"The original agreement was designed to ensure the land was utilized only for water development, and now Olathe can't mortgage the land to make that purpose possible," Armstrong said. "The land is the only asset the Town has to finance the improvements."

The bill will resolve the problem by allowing Olathe to mortgage the land for the specific purpose of improving the water system. In 1994, all restrictions on the property will be lifted and the Town will then own the property outright, he noted.

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Olathe will also be able to develop reservoirs for recreational use on the property, and will protect its rights to store water from the spring runoff under the legislation.

"Unless the problem is quickly resolved," Armstrong told the Subcommittee, "the Town of Olathe faces the very serious prospect of losing its municipal water supply altogether."