

Opening Statement
Rep. Jan Schakowsky
House Energy and Commerce Committee
Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade
Hearing on “H.R. 985, Concrete Masonry Products Research, Education, and
Promotion Act of 2015”
July 10, 2015

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing on H.R. 985, the Concrete Masonry Products Research, Education, and Promotion Act. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on this legislation.

Commodity checkoffs have been used for decades to support the sales and improvements of many products. So far, all of those programs have been overseen by the USDA or Department of Energy. From “Got Milk?” to “Cotton: The Fabric of our Lives”, we are all familiar with these programs and of the products they promote.

With the creation of a Softwood Lumber checkoff, other building materials industries like Hardwood Lumber and Natural Stone have made efforts to create their own checkoff programs. Seeking parity with other building materials, H.R. 985 would create a concrete masonry checkoff program at the Department of Commerce.

Over the past few years, I have heard regularly from the concrete masonry industry, contractors, workers, and my colleagues about the importance of a checkoff program. Just yesterday, I met with a constituent named Jim O’Connor who has worked tirelessly to advance this bill.

Advocates stress that a checkoff would support jobs, improve the quality of concrete products, and reduce adverse environmental impacts of concrete production. I am very interested in pursuing those goals, and I look forward to hearing from industry representatives about how this legislation would get us there.

I also want to make sure that the Commerce Department – which has never managed a checkoff – has the resources and know-how to oversee this kind of program. I want to learn from the Government Accountability Office about the pitfalls of checkoffs and how those can be avoided. And I want to understand the

perspective of those representing other building materials. I look forward to hearing the testimony of our non-concrete industry witnesses today to better understand those issues.

I think we all share the same objectives: to grow jobs, improve the quality and safety of the building materials we use, and heighten consumer awareness. I want to make sure that this legislation is successful in leveraging all of those benefits while limiting any negative impacts that may be anticipated. I know that my colleagues share that goal.

Again, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, and I yield back the balance of my time.