



COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY & COMMERCE
DEMOCRATS
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Tonko Remarks on the Importance of Safe Drinking Water

Washington, D.C. – *Environment Subcommittee Ranking Member Paul Tonko (D-NY) delivered the following opening remarks at a subcommittee hearing titled, "Reinvestment and Rehabilitation of Our Nation's Safe Drinking Water Delivery Systems":*

I want to thank Chairman Shimkus and Chairman Walden for holding this hearing. I know I have sounded like a broken record requesting a drinking water hearing for the past four years, but I am truly grateful to you for bringing us together today.

I also want to thank our witnesses for being here. We will hear from all of them—water utilities, engineers, and environmental stakeholders— that our national drinking water infrastructure needs are immense.

The facts are startling:

- We lose more than 2 **trillion** gallons of treated water each year from leaking pipes.
- There are more than 240,000 water main breaks each year, which cause service disruption and property damage.
- Nearly 100 mid-sized cities across the country are facing shrinking populations, meaning a smaller ratepayer base to support repairs and maintenance.

As Mr. DiLoreto will explain, the American Society of Civil Engineer's recently released report card has given our systems a grade of D. It is clear we are not making the progress necessary to tackle this issue, if anything we are going the wrong way.

EPA has estimated \$384 billion is needed over the next 20 years to keep our systems running.

And as we deal with aging systems— often with century-old pipes— and an alarming number of unregulated and under regulated contaminants, this estimate can only be expected to grow.

The bottom line is I do not see how the needs can be met without significantly greater federal investments.

I feel the need to say that the proposed cuts to EPA outlined in President Trump's budget are not only senseless— they are dangerous.

While funding levels for the SRFs appear to be maintained, the status quo is simply not good enough. We need additional funding.

For example, in my home state of New York, we receive a generous allotment from the Drinking Water SRF, about \$40 million annually. That money is leveraged with State funds, which may allow for about \$700 million in projects this year. The problem is there were over \$4 **billion** in projects requested according to this year's Intended Use Plan.

Projects that are not funded will continue to be deferred, putting more stress on already struggling systems. So even for a state that is committed to addressing this issue, there is still a tremendous gap between available funds and needs.

We cannot fool ourselves into thinking local and state governments can do this on their own. There is a federal responsibility. This infrastructure is too important to continue to be neglected.

And let's make no mistake, there are real consequences— health and economic— when these systems fail.

Flint should have been a wakeup call to Congress that we must do more. The investments we can make now are miniscule when compared to the cost of inaction.

And Flint is not alone. These problems lurk below the surface throughout the country. Here are just a few headlines from this past week:

- From NPR, "Kentucky Community Hopes Trump Infrastructure Plan Will Fix Water System"
- From The Clarion-Ledger, "Weekend water emergency ripples across Jackson"
- From the Associated Press, "6 Madison schools test positive for lead in drinking water"

This is a national issue. And had this hearing been delayed until next week, I am sure we would have found plenty of new stories from different cities.

Last year's water resources bill, the WIIN Act, took a few steps to address this issue.

It created two grant programs— one for lead line replacement and one for small and disadvantaged communities. Congress should fully fund these programs, but that is only the start.

Members of this Subcommittee have good ideas on how to update the Safe Drinking Water Act, which has not been significantly changed for 20 years. Many of these ideas are supported by stakeholders from industry, labor, and the environmental community.

The AQUA Act would reauthorize the Drinking Water SRF for the first time since its inception at significantly higher levels.

Mr. Pallone's bill, the SDWA Amendments, incorporates a number of ideas from our Members, including mandating new standards for lead and other emerging contaminants while making it easier for EPA to set science- and health-based limits and treatment techniques in the future. It also would give grants to schools to replace water fountains that contain lead.

Mr. Peters is working on a bill to provide grants to systems for resiliency, security, and source water protection in the face of hydraulic changes and other emerging threats.

These are good bills that deserve consideration by this Committee.

Also, we must ensure water is included in any potential infrastructure package considered by Congress. We can no longer ignore our hidden infrastructure.

I would encourage all Members of this Committee to visit a water system in your district.

Go speak to your mayors, system managers, or departments of public works. It is likely you will hear what I heard in my district— this is a real and overlooked issue. And Congress can help provide relief to financially burdened local governments and ratepayers.

Every life and every job in this country depends on access to safe drinking water. The needs are great, and the cost of inaction is high.

So I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on the role the federal government should play to rebuild, maintain, and protect this infrastructure, which is vital to our constituents lives.

With that, I yield back.

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