

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.

Markup of 3 Bills

June 16, 2021

Thank you, Chairman Tonko. As you said we're marking up three important public health measures that will address pressing issues in communities across the nation— crumbling drinking water infrastructure, lack of access to affordable drinking water, and PFAS contamination.

H.R. 3291, the AQUA Act, authored by Chairman Tonko and myself, would provide significant federal funding to revitalize our nation's drinking water infrastructure and replace lead service lines nationwide.

As part of his American Jobs Plan, President Biden has called for an investment of \$111 billion in our nation's water infrastructure and the AQUA Act answers that call. These investments can create good-paying jobs, protect public health, and strengthen communities.

Drinking water infrastructure has long been an area of strong bipartisan agreement in this Committee. After all, access to safe drinking water is a necessity, but unfortunately millions of Americans cannot trust the water coming out of their taps. That is unacceptable and should garner bipartisan support for change. Several key components of this bill, including the extensions of important drinking water programs such as the State Revolving Fund, water resiliency, school drinking water, and tribal water programs reflect bipartisan or Republican proposals. That's true also when it comes to the creation of a new program to replace lead service lines nationwide. I hope that will help produce bipartisan support for this bill today.

In particular, I hope we can build bipartisan support for the provisions in the AQUA Act that would strengthen our drinking water standards and improve the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) ability to set those standards when needed. Members of this Subcommittee know all too well that almost all our drinking water standards were set before the 1996 amendments to the statute. The ones set since have all been established under special statutory provisions, meaning that EPA has not managed to complete the general standard setting process under the Safe Drinking Water Act in 25 years.

I hope we can all agree that is a problem, and this bill offers a solution. I look forward to a constructive dialogue on these changes today and as we move forward.

The second bill we will consider, H.R. 3293, the Low-Income Water Customer Assistance Program, is a bipartisan bill led by Representatives Blunt-Rochester and Katko. It would create permanent assistance programs to help low-income customers pay their drinking

water and wastewater bills. The program would be similar to the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, better known as LIHEAP, which helps low-income customers pay their energy bills.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought attention to the need for this assistance, but frankly, the need was there before the pandemic and will be there long after the pandemic ends. A permanent program will be a safety net for low-income customers and the water systems that serve them. This bill enjoys broad stakeholder support, and I look forward to advancing it through the Subcommittee today.

The last bill we will consider, H.R. 2467, the PFAS Action Act, was the product of robust work in this Committee, and this Subcommittee, last Congress. It passed the House last year on a strong bipartisan basis, and I am pleased that it is being led by two important members of this Committee this Congress, Representatives Dingell and Upton. I look forward to continuing that bipartisan support as we move this bill forward and hopefully send it to the President's desk.

PFAS contamination is being found across the nation, and this bill will establish comprehensive regulations to prevent, remediate, and remove that contamination. It will mean safer products, safer air, and safer drinking water.

I want to thank the many members of this Subcommittee on both sides of the aisle who have made protecting drinking water and addressing PFAS contamination a priority. I look forward to today's markup and to advancing these bills to better protect public health, revitalize our infrastructure, and create jobs.