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NEWS RELEASE

Committee on Energy and Commerce

Rep. John D. Dingell, Chairman

For Immediate Release: January 31, 2008

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Wynn, Solis Call for GAO Report

Washington, DC - Reps. Al Wynn (D-MD), the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Environment and Hazardous Materials, and Hilda Solis (D-CA), the Vice Chair of the Subcommittee, today called for a wide reaching Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigation into the rapid growth of the bottled water industry and several areas affecting the quality of Americans' drinking water.

"In the past decade, sales of bottled water have reportedly tripled, but no one is examining the environmental ramifications of Americans shifting their water consumption from the traditional tap to the plastic bottle," Wynn said. "Petroleum is used in the manufacture of bottled water containers and transporting bottled water requires the use of additional fossil fuels. Today, we are asking GAO to look into the scope of these problems."

"As policymakers, it is our responsibility to ensure that all sources of drinking water, including bottled water, are safe for consumers to drink," said Solis. "Given the growing prevalence of bottled water, it is imperative that we have all the information regarding not only the source and labeling, but also the unintended consequences of this trend."

In their letter to GAO, the two lawmakers ask that GAO examine the effect that increased bottled water consumption is having on municipal landfill capacity, as well as the effects of energy use from the transportation and manufacture of bottled water. The lawmakers also raised questions about the purity of bottled water and whether bottled water suppliers provide the details of the water source on their labels.

"Many consumers think that when they buy bottled water, they are consuming water from a pristine natural source that is purer than tap water," Wynn said. "However, recent media reports have exposed some companies simply bottling and selling tap water. GAO should examine how bottled water is labeled so we know consumers of bottled water are not being deceived."

Wynn and Solis are also asking the Government Accountability Office to examine EPA's failure to update its current drinking water standard for Trichloroethylene (TCE). An EPA 2001 assessment found TCE was far more likely to cause cancer than previously believed. Despite this assessment and a recommendation from the National Academy of Science, EPA has failed to update its national drinking water standard for TCE.

"The evidence of the dangers of TCE keep piling up and the EPA keeps failing to act," Wynn added. "Hopefully, GAO can shed some much needed light on the reasons for EPA's inaction."

The EPA's current drinking water standard for TCE allows a maximum of 5 parts per billion, but some have called for a revision of that standard to reduce the maximum amount of TCE allowed in water.

Finally, the letter asks GAO to evaluate the Environmental Protection Agency's process for selecting potential contaminants for regulatory action. The EPA has published two new "Contaminant Candidate Lists" (CCLs) since 1996, but the agency has not identified a single new contaminant for subsequent regulatory action, including perchlorate, an ingredient in rocket fuel which presents a risk to human health in vulnerable populations like pregnant women and children. The letter from Wynn and Solis asks the GAO to evaluate the CCL process to determine if it is workable and effective to protect public health.

"Given that the EPA has published two Contaminant Candidate Lists since 1996, but failed to take action to regulate dangerous contaminants like perchlorate, one has to wonder whether the EPA's process adequately protects the public health," Wynn said.

In November, the Subcommittee passed H.R. 1747, the "Safe Drinking Water for Healthy Communities Act of 2007," legislation authored by Solis and cosponsored by Wynn, which would require EPA to create a national

drinking water standard for perchlorate.

“We must do our best to make sure that water providers and consumers have confidence in the regulatory process,” said Solis. “Unfortunately, the EPA’s track record under the contaminant candidate list leaves room to question how effectively the process may work. I look forward to the GAO’s evaluation of the existing process and to continued efforts to protect public health and the environment.”

“The EPA’s delay on perchlorate is inexcusable,” Wynn concluded. “As the EPA has failed to act, I will continue working to pass legislation to protect Americans from perchlorate in drinking water.”

Last week, Wynn and Solis released a report prepared by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that found that more than 200 commonly consumed foods and beverages are contaminated with perchlorate, bolstering the argument for a national drinking water standard for perchlorate.

[View the letter](#)

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Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce

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