

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of**

Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change Chairman Paul D. Tonko

***Hearing on “The CLEAN Future Act and Drinking Water: Legislation to Ensure Drinking
Water is Safe and Clean”***

May 25, 2021

Last week, Ranking Member McKinley and I were able to participate in the Bipartisan Policy Center’s American Congressional Exchange Program.

Mr. McKinley was kind enough to host me in West Virginia for a few days, and I really appreciate all the hospitality he showed me as I tried to better understand some of the challenges facing his constituents.

I will not pretend that a short visit will solve all our disagreements, but it was eye opening.

One thing that we consistently heard was the need for infrastructure investments, and this Subcommittee can play a critical role in supporting our nation’s struggling water systems.

Today, we will consider 10 bills, including several Republican-led and bipartisan bills, to support the infrastructure, safety, and affordability of our nation’s drinking water.

I always say that every life and every job depend on access to clean drinking water. As we consider how to make our economic recovery robust and equitable, supporting our long-neglected water systems must be a cornerstone of that effort.

Because the needs are immense.

In its 2021 report card, the American Society of Civil Engineers graded the nation’s drinking water infrastructure a C minus.

And the EPA’s 2018 Needs Survey estimated that an investment of over \$472 billion is required to maintain our drinking water systems over the next 20 years.

Every member of this Subcommittee should be accustomed to local news reports of water main breaks, boil water advisories, and service disruptions.

And a few members are sadly all too familiar with major contaminations from lead, PFAS, and other serious threats to public health.

We have 700 main breaks every day. We lose 6 billion gallons of treated water through leaks every day. And there are hundreds of thousands of schools and childcare facilities delivering water through lead components to American children every day.

This is unacceptable. And Congress knows it is unacceptable.

In recent years, there have been bipartisan efforts to increase federal assistance to local water systems, but the needs have continued to grow.

And the financial stress on local governments and their water customers have only become more acute due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

President Biden's American Jobs Plan recognizes this massive need and includes \$111 billion for drinking and waste water infrastructure, including fully replacing every lead service line and addressing PFAS.

The CLEAN Future Act invests \$105 billion over 10 years for our nation's drinking water systems, including \$53 billion for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, \$45 billion to fully replace lead service lines, and \$5 billion to provide assistance to systems with PFAS contamination.

Other proposals under consideration today seek to address near- and long-term affordability challenges and support financially distressed water systems.

And the AQUA Act, which I introduced, would make it easier for EPA to set national standards for emerging contaminants, like PFAS, in the future.

This is what today's bills are about— making our drinking water safer, more reliable, and more affordable; protecting our children from lead exposure at their homes and schools; and ending the threat of having water service shut off amid this prolonged public health crisis.

These are not controversial things.

They are fundamental government services that today local governments are struggling to provide.

If you do not believe that the federal government should be stepping up and doing its fair share for this essential infrastructure, what exactly should we be doing?

May 25, 2021

Page 3

So, I hope today can be the beginning of a conversation that allows us to find consensus that will deliver the assistance needed by our local communities and constituents to address their water needs.

I want to welcome Dr. Jennifer McLain from the Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water to the Subcommittee.

We look forward to your perspective on these bills and our nation's drinking water issues broadly.

And we look forward to working with EPA to refine these proposals as they move forward in the House.