

Congressman Thomas R. Suozzi

Prepared Remarks:

House Appropriations Defense Subcommittee Member Day

Thursday, March 9th 2017

Good morning Chairwoman Granger, Ranking Member Visclosky and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity, and the time, to discuss a critical issue to many of my constituents, as well as some of yours, and an issue many of our colleagues are dealing with in their districts across the country.

Americans deserve and must have access to clean, safe drinking water. In the wake of Flint, Michigan, and other similar incidents across the country, our constituents are rightfully concerned about their local water supply. From local newspapers to national television, they learn lead that lead has been found in a school's drinking fountains, a new carcinogen was discovered downstream from a chemical plant or, as is the case on Long Island, contaminated drinking water stemming from government and defense contractor activity. I'm referring to the Bethpage Plume, a toxic plume, which originated at former U.S. Navy and Northrop Grumman manufacturing sites, and has contaminated an aquifer that is the sole source of drinking water for millions of people on Long Island.

During World War II, and in the post war era, Long Island was a military and defense industry hub. Long Islanders produced the aircraft that helped lead the Allies to victory and worked on the technology that ushered in the jet era and sent Americans into space. We are proud of our contributions to the nation's defense and exploration, from the Revolutionary

War, through World War II to the present day. But, my constituents are also concerned that those that have profited the most, as well as their own government, are failing to properly mitigate and clean up the environmental impacts of manufacturing sophisticated weapons systems and modern aviation technology.

I represent New York's third Congressional district, which stretches from northeastern Queens, along Long Island's north shore, through Nassau County and into Suffolk County. I am also a lifelong resident of the district and, along with my family, friends and neighbors, we have waited over forty years for the responsible parties to step up, assume responsibility and truly address the issue. Instead we've received studies, reports and remedial efforts while responsibility is litigated and liability is shielded. Meanwhile, the plume spreads - now covering an area 2 miles wide and 3 miles long - and is traveling south into our colleague Peter King's district on Long Island's south shore.

The Defense subcommittee on appropriations may seem like an odd place to speak about environmental issues, but the funding to help clean up the plume is subject to annual appropriations to the Defense Environmental Restoration Account of the Navy. Congressional funding is currently insufficient to address the Bethpage plume, let alone the thousand plus sites, at hundreds of locations scattered around the country. Representatives from the Navy have told me it would take an estimated \$4 billion dollars to clean up every site, but Congress continually authorizes and appropriates pennies on the dollar. Furthermore, the Navy cannot prioritize sites and must spread funding across sites and locations. On its face, this may seem like a good idea, but this approach forces the Navy to engage in remedial efforts instead of

comprehensively addressing project with high cleanup costs. Engaging in remedial efforts, without fully addressing the issue, will cost taxpayers more in the long run.

We have a responsibility, from the federal government to local water authorities, to work with all stakeholders to ensure access to clean drinking water and, where appropriate, hold those accountable for contaminating the water supply. Nowhere is this truer than when contaminants in the water stem from government related activity. I request that the committee fully appropriate authorized amounts and I look forward to working with you and our colleagues to fully address this and similar issues with necessary and appropriate funding levels.