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CORROSION, COLLAPSE, AND CLEAN-UP:

EXAMINING THE POTOMAC INTERCEPTOR COLLAPSE

WEDNESDAY, MAY 20, 2026

House of Representatives,

Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations,

Committee on Energy and Commerce,

Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:15 a.m. in Room 2123, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. John Joyce [chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Joyce, Balderson, Palmer, Weber, Allen, Harshbarger, Guthrie (ex officio); Clarke, DeGette, Tonko, Ocasio-Cortez, and Pallone (ex officio).

Staff Present: Ansley Boylan, Director of Operations; Byron Brown, Chief Counsel; Jessica Donlon, General Counsel; Sydney Greene, Director of Finance and Logistics; Jay Gulshen, Chief Counsel; Brittany Havens, Chief Counsel; Megan

Jackson, Staff Director; AT Johnson, Special Advisor; Adam Joseph, Digital Director; Ben Mullaney, Press Secretary; Lillian Noland, Clerk; Seth Ricketts, Clerk; Chris Sarley, Member Services/Stakeholder Director; Matt VanHyfte, Communications Director; Christopher Victory, Research Assistant; Kim Waskowsky, Professional Staff Member; Timia Crisp, Minority Professional Staff Member; Austin Flack, Minority Professional Staff Member; Waverly Gordon, Minority Deputy Staff Director and General Counsel; Tiffany Guarascio, Minority Staff Director; Ciara Home, Minority Fellow; Serena Klebba, Minority Staff Assistant; Brendan Lopez, Minority Press Assistant; Will McAuliffe, Minority Chief Counsel, OI; Constance O'Connor, Minority Senior Counsel; Christina Parisi, Minority Professional Staff Member; Emma Roehrig, Minority Staff Assistant; Harry Samuels, Minority Counsel; Andrew Souvall, Minority Director of Communications, Outreach, and Member Services; Hannah Treger, Minority Staff Assistant; and Caroline Wood, Minority Research Analyst.

*Mr. Joyce. Good morning, and welcome to today's hearing titled, "Corrosion, Collapse, and Cleanup: Examining the Potomac Interceptor Collapse.’’

Today's hearing will examine the collapse of DC Water's Potomac Interceptor, a 54-mile sanitary sewer system that runs through parts of Virginia, Maryland and D.C. The collapse, which occurred on January 19, resulted in hundreds of gallons of untreated sewage overflowing onto nearby land and down the Potomac River. This incident raised serious concerns about the resilience of critical wastewater infrastructure, and the impact that a collapse or break like this can have on our communities, including on safe drinking water, public health, the environment, local businesses.

The Potomac Interceptor is a vital component of the region's critical wastewater infrastructure. When it failed, it caused over 240 million gallons of wastewater to overflow into the Potomac River, threatening water quality, ecosystems, and the health of surrounding communities that rely on this river for recreation, for fish and shellfish harvesting, and safe water drinking water once it has been treated.

Fortunately, because of where the collapse happened, the incident did not affect safe drinking water. But if the break had happened just a few miles upstream, it would have been a completely different story. Still, the collapse had

far-reaching impacts on the region.

From a public health perspective, exposure to untreated wastewater can carry harmful pathogens and pollutants, posing serious health risks to anyone who might be near the affected areas.

Environmentally, wastewater discharge can degrade aquatic habitats, harm wildlife, and have impacts on native species.

Economically, the effects ripple outward, impacting local businesses, tourism, fisheries, some of which claim they have lost thousands of dollars of revenue due to public perception of the cleanliness of the river following this incident.

This incident raises questions about the management and oversight of this critical infrastructure: What led to the collapse? Was this failure preventable? Were there warning signs that were being ignored or even missed? Did permitting requirements create unnecessary delays in moving forward with needed repairs?

Given the age and the condition of the Potomac Interceptor, what is known about other vulnerabilities in the pipe and what is being done to prevent another break or collapse from eventually or possibly happening?

Equally important is understanding the roles and the responsibilities of other entities as it relates to the

Potomac Interceptor. DC Water owns and operates Potomac Interceptor, but multiple agencies and jurisdictions have roles and responsibilities with respect to permitting and regulatory oversight, or have helped respond to the collapse, including Federal partners such as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the National Park Service, as well as state and regional authorities.

Today's hearing is about identifying failures or gaps, strengthening oversight, and ensuring that our infrastructure systems are equipped to protect the public and the environment in the face of growing demands and aging assets. We owe it to the American people to fully understand the causes and the consequences of this failure, and to take meaningful steps to prevent similar incidents in the future.

While this hearing will focus on the Potomac Interceptor, aging wastewater infrastructure is a nationwide problem. A thorough investigation into this -- led up to this incident and the response following it is critical to establish how best to repair similar infrastructure and to prevent another large-scale spill. The facts established by this hearing can help us protect the health and the safety of communities that all of us represent.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today. We look forward to hearing from you to learn more about the

incidents and the lessons learned.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Joyce follows:]

**********COMMITTEE INSERT**********

*Mr. Joyce. With that I now recognize our Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, Ms. Clark, for her opening statement.

*Ms. Clarke. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

On January 19 part of the Potomac Interceptor collapsed, releasing more than 200 million gallons of raw sewage into the Potomac River, resulting in one of the worst sewage overflows in U.S. history. Thankfully, DC Water and Federal partners quickly contained the overflow and made emergency repairs to stop the spill. So far, the emergency response appears to have been successful, but there are important lessons that need to be learned to prevent crises like these in our communities.

Unfortunately, there appears to have been an avoidable emergency. It has long been known that segments of the more than 60-year-old Potomac Interceptor was corroding and needed repairs. Like many other water utilities with aging infrastructure, DC Water was aware that the Potomac Interceptor needed repairs, and had a plan to make those repairs. But it did not get done in time.

The Potomac Interceptor collapse is not unique. It represents a common problem in America: crumbling infrastructure. EPA records tens of thousands of sewer overflows each year that release raw sewage into our communities and waterways. EPA does not even count how often

sewer backups spill raw sewage into Americans' homes and businesses.

Any pollution released into the Potomac River risks significant local, regional, and even national consequences. The coordinated response appears to have been addressed -- have addressed the mess that was caused by the collapse. However, they have ignored the -- President Trump's decision to demolish the East Wing of the White House to make way for a golden ballroom and look away as Trump dumped the rubble which contained lead and other toxic metals in a national park surrounded by the Potomac River. Republicans have even defended the President's budget request, which proposes enormous cuts to the very EPA water programs that have prevented incidents like the Potomac Interceptor collapse. President Trump's pro-pollution agenda is creating harmful messes all over the place.

We do not have the luxury of ignoring pollution in our communities or our national parks, whether it is dumped there by the President, the result of a sewage spill, or due to Administration giveaways to polluters. We will not prevent another Potomac Interceptor collapse or any other sewage spills by cutting the EPA programs that help prevent them. And we're not doing enough by having a hearing on this one collapse. We should have -- we should be having oversight hearings on all the ways that the Trump Administration is

allowing polluters to make our air and water less healthy, and why the President thought it was okay to knock down a third of the White House and dump it in a public park.

This is only the tenth hearing in the Oversight and Investigation Subcommittee this Congress, and this is only the third hearing in this subcommittee this year.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Clarke follows:]

**********COMMITTEE INSERT**********

*Ms. Clarke. With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

*Mr. Joyce. Thank you. The gentlelady yields. The chair recognizes the chairman of the full committee, Mr. Guthrie, for five minutes for an opening statement.

*The Chair. Thank you. Good morning. Good morning to everyone, and thank you, Chairman Joyce, for convening this important hearing. Thank you, Ranking Member Clarke, we appreciate it.

I also want to thank our witnesses for being before us today as we examine the Potomac Interceptor collapse and its consequences for public health, environmental safety, and infrastructure reliability.

The collapse of this critical wastewater system was not a minor incident. It resulted in the release of more than 240 million gallons, the equivalent of roughly 360 Olympic-sized swimming pools, of untreated sewage into surrounding land and into the Potomac River which is a vital resource for the National Capital Region. This event raised serious public health concerns, disrupted ecosystems, and highlighted vulnerabilities in aging infrastructure that serve millions of Americans.

While emergency actions eventually contained the overflow of wastewater and repaired the pipe and remediation efforts are still underway, significant questions remain about what was known about the condition of the pipe leading

to the collapse, what was being done to address known vulnerabilities to the pipe, and whether there are other similar or more urgent vulnerabilities in other sections of the 50-mile pipe.

A key question today is whether there are lessons learned that can be applied moving forward to prevent something like this from happening again. Incidents like this erode public trust. Just as fraud undermines confidence in Federal health programs, failures in critical infrastructure undermines confidence in the systems Americans rely on every day. When infrastructure fails at this scale, consequences extend far beyond the immediate area. They can impact public safety, environmental resilience and economic activity.

Today's hearing is about oversight, accountability, and ensuring good stewardship of essential systems that the public relies on. Doing so ensures that infrastructure systems are properly maintained and risks are addressed proactively. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses and working towards solutions that strengthen oversight and protect our communities.

[The prepared statement of The Chair follows:]

**********COMMITTEE INSERT**********

*The Chair. With that, Mr. Chair, I will yield back.

*Mr. Joyce. Thank you. The gentleman yields. The chair recognizes the Ranking Member of the full committee, Mr. Pallone, for five minutes for an opening statement.

*Mr. Pallone. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The January collapse of a segment of the Potomac Interceptor led to hundreds of millions of gallons of wastewater flowing into the Potomac River. And while the collapse did not threaten the capital's drinking water supply, this is yet another reminder of our Nation's aging infrastructure and the risks of failing to address it. This hearing is an opportunity for us to examine what happened here and how we can work to prevent and address infrastructure failures across the country.

The Potomac Interceptor collapse received lots of attention due to its size and proximity to the Nation's capital, but many of our Nation's towns and cities continue to experience similar issues as infrastructure ages. Decades of under-investment in our water systems have created a vicious cycle that plays out beneath our feet and out of sight. The reality is that addressing aging infrastructure requires resources and attention that it does not always receive.

So the EPA's most recent needs assessment found a massive shortfall. Water utilities need more than $150

billion just to repair aging pipe systems like the Potomac Interceptor that transports sewage to waste treatment facilities.

And I ask, if I could, Mr. Chairman, unanimous consent to enter into the record the President's 2027 budget request for EPA and EPA's most recent Clean Watersheds and Drinking Water Needs survey.

*Mr. Joyce. No objection. So ordered.

[The information follows:]

**********COMMITTEE INSERT**********

*Mr. Pallone. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

But despite these clear needs, just last month we watched Republicans on this committee nod along as EPA Administrator Zeldin argued for the massive cuts to water infrastructure funding included in Trump's 2027 budget request. That budget request calls for an 86 percent cut to the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund which helps water systems access low-cost financing for needed upgrades like replacing lead service lines and upgrading treatment technology.

Trump's budget calls for an even larger 90 percent cut to the Clean Water State Revolving Fund which provides essential support for wastewater and stormwater projects that protect public health.

Overall, the President's budget requests a 67 percent cut to EPA's Office of Water, meaning water infrastructure would receive less funding and communities will continue to grapple with aging infrastructure and contaminants.

Now America's water systems are struggling, and Trump's budget proposals would only make that worse. EPA did good work in helping to address the serious issues created by the Potomac Interceptor collapse, but an effective emergency response does nothing to prevent future incidents. Unfortunately, massive cuts to EPA programs that help prevent water infrastructure from failing would almost guarantee a

future with more emergencies, where EPA simply lurches from one preventable water crisis to the next.

Trump has made crystal clear what his priorities are. While Americans struggle to make ends meet, Republicans are planning to give $1 billion in taxpayer dollars to Trump for the White House ballroom that he touted would be privately funded. When Trump was asked how an economic toll on America weighs on him, he responded, and I quote, "I don't think Americans -- I don't think about Americans' financial situation.''

So his reckless war of choice against Iran has now racked up about $30 billion in direct costs and countless more in damage to our economy and expense to Americans at the grocery store and the gas pump. And now the Trump Administration has created a $1.8 billion slush fund to pay off Trump's friends and followers, potentially including those who stormed the Capitol and assaulted Capitol Police officers.

So the President has proven time and time again that his priorities are not in the best interest of the American people. Rather than gutting our water infrastructure programs, we should be investing in them so that incidents like the Potomac Interceptor collapse are less common than they already are. But that is not what is happening with this President and this administration. They simply don't

care about infrastructure or about the public's financial situation. It is unfortunate, and hopefully we can change that.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Pallone follows:]

**********COMMITTEE INSERT**********

*Mr. Pallone. And with that I yield back the balance of my time, Mr. Chairman.

*Mr. Joyce. The gentleman yields. That concludes members' opening statements.

The chair would like to remind members that, pursuant to the committee rules, all members' opening statements will be made part of the record.

We want to thank our witnesses for being here today and for taking the time to testify before the subcommittee. You will have the opportunity to give an opening statement followed by a round of questions from members.

Our witnesses today are Jessica Kramer, assistant administrator, Office of Water, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; Colonel Francis Pera, commander, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Baltimore District; and Edward Wenschhof, acting superintendent, Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

We appreciate all of you being here today, and I look forward to hearing from you. You are aware that this committee is holding an oversight hearing and, when doing so, has the practice of taking the testimony under oath. Do you have any objection to testifying under oath?

Seeing no objection, we will proceed. The chair advises you that you are entitled to be advised by counsel pursuant

to House rules. Do you desire to be to be advised by counsel during your testimony today?

Seeing none, please rise. Raise your right hand.

[Witnesses sworn.]

*Mr. Joyce. Seeing the witnesses have all answered in the affirmative, you are now sworn in and under oath, subject to the penalties set forth in title 18, section 1001 of the United States Code.

You may be seated and, with that, I now recognize Assistant Administrator Kramer for five minutes to give an opening statement.

STATEMENT OF JESSICA KRAMER, ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR, OFFICE OF WATER, U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY; FRANCIS B. PERA, COMMANDER, U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, BALTIMORE DISTRICT; AND EDWARD WENSCHHOF, ACTING SUPERINTENDENT, CHESAPEAKE & OHIO CANAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

STATEMENT OF JESSICA KRAMER

*Ms. Kramer. Good morning, Chairman Joyce, Ranking Member Clarke, and members of the subcommittee. My name is Jess Kramer, and I'm the assistant administrator for the Office of Water at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about EPA's role in leading a successful, coordinated Federal response to the Potomac Interceptor collapse.

On May 6 the Federal Government completed its remediation of the Potomac Interceptor collapse area and fully demobilized its presence on site. The goal of this Federal assistance was to expeditiously remediate the collapse site and surrounding area. I'm proud of the work EPA, along with our Federal partners, did to ensure this was completed in time for the America 250 festivities and deliver on the agency's commitment to restore the Potomac to pre-collapse conditions.

Throughout this process, EPA maintained open and transparent lines of communication with our partners at all levels and with the public. As you are likely aware, several weeks ago the Department of Justice, on behalf of the EPA, also filed a civil complaint in Federal court against D.C. Water and the District of Columbia for Clean Water Act violations. In keeping with longstanding agency practice, EPA does not comment on pending litigation.

The Potomac Interceptor is a sanitary sewer line managed by DC Water that conveys up to 60 million gallons of wastewater every day from parts of Virginia and Maryland to DC Water's Blue Plains Advanced Wastewater Treatment Plant. On January 19, 2026, a portion of the pipe, which was 72 inches in diameter, collapsed, causing an estimated 240 million gallons of raw, untreated sewage to flow into the Potomac River.

Following the collapse, EPA's Mid-Atlantic Regional Office Region 3 performed inspections in coordination with state and local partners, and issued a Clean Water Act Section 308 information request to DC Water. EPA took on a heightened role in coordinating and leading the Federal response to the collapse in mid-February when D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser declared a public emergency and requested Federal assistance to address the pipe collapse. President Trump immediately approved Mayor Bowser's request and, on

February 21, 2026, assigned EPA as the lead Federal agency to respond to the emergency. I was designated as the senior response officer overseeing the effort. Senior officials at EPA, including Administrator Zeldin and myself, have been consistently engaged and on site as appropriate.

Throughout the repair and remediation process, EPA actively coordinated with partners at all levels to ensure appropriate and expeditious measures were utilized to protect public health and prevent additional overflows. For example, the Army Corps of Engineers installed a wastewater diversion system which allowed crews to remediate the collapse through wet weather while mitigating further contamination from stormwater runoff.

Additionally, Federal partners led the remediation and rehabilitation of soil impacted by the overflow with soil sampling beginning on March 9, 2026.

Thanks in part to the coordinated Federal actions on site, wastewater flow was returned to the Potomac Interceptor on March 14, a full week ahead of projected schedule. This allowed the focus of ongoing work to fully center on the remaining environmental remediation. EPA continued to lead the Federal components of that remediation in coordination with FEMA, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the National Park Service, and other Federal partners. Remediation and rehabilitation activities included water and soil sampling,

raking and removing contaminated material, including sewage impacted soils, covering disturbed soil with seed mix and erosion control blankets, removing branches, fallen trees, brush and debris, and flushing the C&O canal with fresh water from the Potomac.

Additionally, on March 16, EPA assumed responsibility for water quality sampling previously conducted by the D.C. Department of Energy and Environment. The daily sample results were processed at EPA's Environmental Science Center located at Fort Meade, Maryland. The results for each day's sampling were evaluated, quality assured before being posted on publicly -- excuse me, posted publicly on DOEE's Potomac Interceptor monitoring webpage.

A top priority for EPA throughout this response was ensuring continued drinking water safety. Fortunately, the sewage overflow occurred downstream of the Washington Aqueduct's primary drinking water intake. In addition, other than the aqueduct's secondary intake, which has been closed since fall of 2025, there are no other drinking water intakes along the Potomac River downstream of the overflow site. As a result, the overflow did not significantly threaten safe drinking water.

From the onset of this response, we made clear that EPA would be on the ground working at full speed until the Potomac Interceptor site and surrounding area were fully

remediated. Thanks to President Trump's decisive action and leadership and a coordinated effort across Federal agencies, we kept that promise and restored the Potomac River to pre-collapse conditions.

Thank you again, Chairman Joyce, Ranking Member Clarke, and members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to discuss this important issue, and I look forward to answering your questions today.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Kramer follows:]

**********COMMITTEE INSERT**********

*Mr. Joyce. Thank you. With that the chair now recognizes Colonel Pera for his five minutes for an opening statement.

STATEMENT OF FRANCIS B. PERA

*Colonel Pera. Chairman Joyce, Vice Chairman Balderson, Ranking Member Clarke, and members of the subcommittee, I'm honored to testify before you today on the Potomac Interceptor collapse and to represent the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Baltimore District who, in addition to responding to the collapse, has command responsibility for the Washington Aqueduct which has provided safe water to the National Capital Region for more than 165 years.

I'd like to deliver a clear, bottom-line reassurance to this committee and to the public: the drinking water supply managed by the Washington Aqueduct remains completely safe, secure, and unaffected, as our drinking water system is entirely separate from DC Water's regional wastewater infrastructure, including the Potomac Interceptor.

The Washington Aqueduct collects source water from the Potomac River at two locations: Great Falls and Little Falls. Once collected, this water travels via conduits to our conventional treatment and purification plants before distribution to three wholesale customers: DC Water, Fairfax Water, and Arlington County. The finished water meets or exceeds all EPA standards.

The spill from the Potomac Interceptor occurred several miles downstream from our Great Falls intake and several

miles upstream from our Little Falls intake. Because our Little Falls intake had been closed since the fall of 2025 due to low seasonal demand, the source water was being drawn exclusively from our Great Falls intake and unaffected by the spill. Our operations team confirmed this immediately after notification that a spill had occurred.

To ensure the stability of water at our intakes, Washington Aqueduct personnel sample and test source water at the intakes frequently. In any given year, our EPA-certified testing lab conducts more than 65,000 individual tests for hundreds of bacterial, organic, and inorganic compounds. We are fully committed to public safety.

Beyond the normal operations of the Washington Aqueduct, the Corps of Engineers remains on the front lines of response to flood and disaster events. On February 20 the President approved Federal support to the District of Columbia's emergency declaration. That evening, the Corps of Engineers activated its Emergency Operations Center. On February 21 we were walking the ground with our technical response team, emergency contractor, and DC Water. By February 22 we designed a stormwater diversion system and had the first components installed by that same evening. We completed the full installation within a week.

This diversion system served two goals. First, it safeguarded the pumping site used to divert wastewater while

emergency repairs and remediation could proceed. Forecasted rain threatened to inundate bypass operations, and we were there to prevent that. Second, it safeguarded the environment by inhibiting further pollution from entering the Potomac River. We did this by channeling clean stormwater away from the contaminated soil before it entered the Potomac River at a nearby confluence.

Under the leadership of the EPA, through the mission assignment process of FEMA, Corps of Engineers facilitated the timely remediation of land impacted by the spill by assuming responsibility for two of the four identified remediation areas. Those areas were known as areas 2 and 3, and focused on the soil underneath Rock Run Culvert, and the downstream creek bank areas where the runoff enters the Potomac River.

With a deference to the ecosystem and to public safety, our crews took an almost surgical approach to removing soil in three-inch layers where visual contamination was present. This material was safely transported to an approved offsite disposal facility. My written testimony contains additional operational details and visual reference of remediation for areas 2 and 3.

The Baltimore District stands prepared to do what the Corps of Engineers does best: provide world-class engineering solutions to our Nation's toughest challenges.

We look forward to working with the committee on this issue.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of this committee. This concludes my statement, and I look forward to answering questions you or the other members may have. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Colonel Pera follows:]

**********COMMITTEE INSERT**********

*Mr. Joyce. The gentleman yields. The chair now recognizes Mr. Edward Wenschhof for five minutes for an opening statement.

STATEMENT OF EDWARD WENSCHHOF

*Mr. Wenschhof. Chairman Joyce, Ranking Member Clarke, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the recent break in the Potomac Interceptor Sanitary Sewer System and the Department of the Interior --

*Mr. Joyce. You might want to pull the mike a little closer.

*Mr. Wenschhof. The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park contains within its legislative boundary a significant stretch of the Potomac Interceptor, managed by the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority, commonly referred to as DC Water. Constructed in the 1960s, the pipeline ranges up to 92 inches in diameter and conveys up to 60 million gallons of wastewater per day to the District of Columbia's Blue Plains Wastewater Treatment Facility.

The presence of DC Water infrastructure on land administered by the National Park Service is not unique to the C&O Canal Park. Due to the age of the city's infrastructure, a substantial portion of the system lies beneath park land throughout the District. The NPS has been working closely with DC Water on major initiatives, including the now completed Anacostia River Tunnel project and the Clean Rivers Project, which spans three separate national

park units and includes multiple combined sewage overflow projects within Rock Creek Park.

On January 19, 2026 C&O Canal Park staff received a notification of an active sewage overflow within park boundaries near the Interstate 495 crossing in Montgomery County, Maryland. The overflow affected an eastbound lane of the Clara Barton Parkway and flowed through park land, exiting via the historic Rock Run masonry culvert and into the Potomac River.

To mitigate further impacts, the NPS permitted DC Water to use a section of the C&O Canal to bypass the collapsed pipe and convey wastewater four-tenths of a mile downstream, where it then flowed back into the Potomac Interceptor. DC Water started using the canal to bypass the break on January 24, 2026. DC Water completed temporary repairs, removed the bypass pumps, and returned full wastewater flow to the Potomac Interceptor on March 14, 2026.

Following the interim repair, the NPS, DC Water, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency initiated remediation across four defined areas: the stormwater channel, the Rock Run Stream and Culvert, the Potomac River shoreline, and the canal prism from lock 14 to lock 10. Remediation is complete in the first three areas and continues in the canal prism.

Crews removed contaminated soils in the prism down to

the clay liner, and deeper in some sections where additional contamination was visible. Work crews are removing soil with hand tools from within the locks and using soap, water, and bristle brushes to scrub and clean the historic masonry. Once remediation is complete, the NPS will work with DC Water on long-term restoration, including replanting of trees and shrubs and understory vegetation, as well as restoring threatened plant species.

For resources that cannot be restored, the NPS can seek response costs and damages under title 54 of the United States Code. We will pursue cost recovery under the special use permit for monitoring and response efforts. The NPS will continue coordinating with DC Water on long-term repair and rehabilitation of the portion -- proportion of the Potomac Interceptor located within the legislative boundaries of the C&O Canal Park.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony and I'm happy to answer any questions you or the subcommittee may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Wenschhof follows:]

**********COMMITTEE INSERT**********

*Mr. Joyce. I thank you all for your testimony, and we will now move to questioning. I will begin and recognize myself for five minutes.

A question for all three of you. First of all, please delineate the timeline of when you were first notified of what occurred on January 19.

Assistant Administrator Kramer, when was the EPA notified?

*Ms. Kramer. The EPA was notified on January 19.

*Mr. Joyce. Colonel Pera, when was the Army Corps notified?

*Colonel Pera. Chairman, the Army Corps was notified on January 19.

*Mr. Joyce. And when was the -- Mr. Wenschhof, when was the National Park Service notified?

*Mr. Wenschhof. National Park Service was notified on the evening of January 19.

*Mr. Joyce. So knowing that you were notified on the day that the actions first were witnessed to occur, what were your first initial actions?

Assistant Administrator Kramer?

*Ms. Kramer. Chairman, inspectors from our region 3 office were on site the next day, on January 20.

*Mr. Joyce. Colonel Pera, when was the Army Corps on site?

*Colonel Pera. Chairman, our operations department for the Washington Aqueduct was on site within an hour of notification. Our initial look was at the intakes, so we checked two intakes, one at the Great Falls intake and the second at Little Falls, just to validate that we had a level of contamination that was either non-existent or at a treatable level.

*Mr. Joyce. Mr. Wenschhof, when was the National Park Service on site?

*Mr. Wenschhof. The United States Park Police were on site around the time of the break on the 19, and then National Park staff from the park went down on the 20th.

*Mr. Joyce. We understand that this crosses many jurisdictions, and that is why we wanted to set the table with -- the discussion with each and every one of you of what was your involvement and how early that involvement occurred.

Assistant Administrator Kramer, recognizing these jurisdictional boundaries, what can impact -- which entitles underlying permitting and oversight and enforcement, what impact do you feel because of the location of that pipe is at issue? Where does each of the entities come into play?

*Ms. Kramer. Thank you, Chairman.

It is a little bit complex, so I'm going to start with the DC Water facility, the Blue Plains facility. Because that is in the District of Columbia, EPA is the permitting

authority under the Clean Water Act section 402, which is the authority that we issue -- we, EPA -- issue NPDES, National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System, permits. EPA issues that NPDES permit to DC Water. That provision -- that permit, excuse me, includes limits to ensure that there are not exceedances of pollutants from discharges, point source discharges to Waters of the United States. The collapse --

*Mr. Joyce. Let me interrupt at that point, because you talk about DC Water, and they claim that the last overflow to reach the Potomac River occurred on February 8.

In March, however, it was determined -- and Colonel Pera, I will ask you to comment on this -- it was determined that sampling -- that contaminated water was leaking out of the culvert that is located underneath the portion of the C&O canal that was being used as part of the bypass system that you referenced to hold and route the wastewater around the collapsed location. Is that the same culvert under which the unnamed tributary runs through and down the Potomac River?

*Colonel Pera. Chairman, that is the same. That area underneath Rock Run Culvert is a perennial stream that exits and enters --

*Mr. Joyce. Can you speak closer to the microphone? Sorry.

*Colonel Pera. No, I'm sorry. Chairman, you're correct that that tributary that you're talking about runs underneath

Rock Run Culvert and enters -- it's part of a perennial stream that enters into confluence between that stream and the Potomac at the end of it. So the short answer is yes.

*Mr. Joyce. Am I correct that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers subsequently installed a sandbag dam and pumping operation to divert the water that was coming from the leak?

*Colonel Pera. Chairman, there was already a dam in existence. Part of our scope of work --

*Mr. Joyce. Did you reinforce that dam?

*Colonel Pera. We did reinforce the dam --

*Mr. Joyce. And what materials did you use to reinforce that?

*Colonel Pera. So it was -- we had a poly liner, right, to prevent any of the runoff and to contain it. And then it was held in place by sandbags to prevent vertical control of the --

*Mr. Joyce. Did you feel that was successful?

*Colonel Pera. We did feel that was successful.

*Mr. Joyce. Do you feel that there could have been other components that would have made that even more successful from the overflow that you were seeing?

*Colonel Pera. The overflow that we were trying to control with the original establishment of that dam was really for the cleaning effort of the rock wall culvert. So that goes back to the detergent and brushing that Mr.

Wenschhof talked about underneath the culvert as part of our scope.

Once we determined that there was also a leak coming from the C&O Canal into that culvert, that -- a couple of things happened. One, we controlled the water coming from the far side and piped it through the culvert so it didn't run within the culvert and then out to the perennial stream. That was the first measure to control wastewater coming out. The second one was installing a bypass pump. So once we pretty much collected the water underneath the culvert in that containment poly line system, we pumped it from there back into a contaminated stream within the C&O Canal.

*Mr. Joyce. Do you feel that those measures protected that perennial stream?

*Colonel Pera. I feel like they did.

*Mr. Joyce. Do you feel that additional measures could have even protected it to a greater extent?

*Colonel Pera. At that point, Chairman, I think that we took the best measures we could based on the environment that was -- as it existed that day and the tools that we had available. I'm not sure that there was another option available.

*Mr. Joyce. My time has expired. I now yield to the Ranking Member, Ms. Clarke, for her five minutes of questioning.

*Ms. Clarke. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

We cannot ignore the disasters happening in our communities, our national parks, or the White House. We do not have the luxury to think small. We must see the Potomac Interceptor collapse and place it in the larger context of our country's aging infrastructure and administration's actions that put polluters over people so that we can act on the lessons learned.

Ms. Kramer, as the senior response officer and in your testimony, you -- this morning -- you recounted the interagency response in the wake of the sewage spill. I imagine you can offer a cross-agency perspective. In thinking about future recovery efforts, what worked here and what advice would you give to other local governments or utilities facing a similar situation to the ones we are discussing here today?

*Ms. Kramer. Thank you. I'm going to start with the end of your question first.

I think that everybody that's spoken today on the dais has mentioned aging infrastructure. There's no question that we have an aging infrastructure issue facing our drinking water and wastewater infrastructure across this country. Asset management is more important than ever. We talk about the various funding opportunities that exist: the state revolving funds, the WIFIA program, various programs that we

have that funnel through EPA. Those funds can't address operations and maintenance. By law they're not able to be provided for that. And so it is time for us to look critically across this sector and focus on asset management, which is one of the biggest priorities that we have in the Office of Water right now.

I'll pivot to your second question -- or your first question, I suppose --

*Ms. Clarke. I am sorry, just what do you mean by asset management?

*Ms. Kramer. Physical infrastructure management, assessing vulnerabilities that exist earlier and in real time by the municipalities that own and operate the infrastructure, ensuring that there -- so technical, managerial, and financial capability, which is a requirement for operation that we as EPA look at across drinking water and wastewater systems, ensuring that that TMF capacity is sufficient to be projecting out what action should be taken and how do you apply the funds that you have in a way that not only allows for operations and maintenance -- which again, can't be covered by those Federal funds -- but also is a real, true forward-looking projection of the assets and the physical infrastructure that you have ahead of you so that you are addressing vulnerabilities before something like a collapse happens.

So it's that strategic, holistic look that, to be frank, is challenged right now not only because of the aging infrastructure, but also because of the workforce crisis that we have in the drinking water and the wastewater space. You have aging -- a workforce that is aging out. You have a wide range of different types of facilities and different workforces that are needed. And so especially building up that workforce around that technical, managerial, and financial capability to be able to do these projections and really focus on the management of these physical infrastructure pieces, that is so vital right now.

And so this is a critical moment for us to be having that discussion and for us in the Office of Water at EPA to be really focused on that through the training and technical assistance that we provide.

*Ms. Clarke. Thank you. Luck played a large part in keeping D.C.'s drinking water safe. If the Potomac Interceptor collapse had been further upriver, the capital's water supply could have been contaminated. We are not -- we cannot rely on luck. That is why in 2022 Congress ordered the Army Corps of Engineers to conduct a feasibility study to identify a secondary water source for the Washington, D.C. area, and provided funding for that study in 2024. Earlier this year, however, the Army Corps of Engineers testified to Congress that it was narrowing that feasibility study to only

a 12-hour expansion of the existing reservoir to find a quick win that addresses some of the near-term issues.

Colonel Pera, if the Potomac Interceptor collapse had contaminated D.C.'s drinking water, how would 12 more hours of contaminated drinking water been useful to the impacted residents?

*Colonel Pera. Representative Clarke, I would agree that the additional 12 hours would be of limited utility. The secondary water source effort that we're looking at right now within the Corps of Engineers does provide a capacity for additional drinking water.

If you think about the fact that we -- that this has been in existence for 165 years, getting to a point now where we acknowledge the requirement for a secondary source is important, but larger regional solutions will take time to develop, and they will be multi-billion-dollar efforts. What we're doing is two efforts in parallel. We are looking at a first Federal effort to be able to produce an actionable item that can have some sort of meaningful impact within the short term, and that was what was briefed to you, ma'am. So that is that 12 hours that we gain immediately.

In parallel, we are working with federal partners, state partners, non-Federal entities to look at other ways to be able to source a secondary solution outside of what we're doing right now with the Federal Government. And that effort

is being taken on by the Washington Suburban Sanitation Commission and other partners who are in the water space. And what we're doing is we're pairing those efforts, and we're approaching them simultaneously so that, as we create that short win, we're also working toward the engineering, designing, and then the funding for that larger effort that's going to take more time to get in place.

So I agree that the initial effort that the Corps of Engineers is approaching is a smaller effort, but it is part of a larger solution.

*Ms. Clarke. Very well.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

*Mr. Joyce. The gentlelady yields. The chair now recognizes Chair of the committee, Mr. Guthrie, for his five minutes of questioning.

*The Chair. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And I am going to be focused on -- Superintendent, if I -- my questions will be directed at you, and it is with the spirit of we have to figure out what happened and how we fix it going into the future.

I actually represent Mammoth Cave National Park and the boyhood and birthplace of President Lincoln. So the National Park Service is very important in my district, and things like this we want to make sure are done correctly -- and great respect for.

But I want to start -- there was an article in the Washington Post in April that described how concerned -- so I quote -- "concerns about the removal of trees and vegetation, along with other environmental impacts postpone repairs to the Potomac Interceptor.'' The article also notes, however, that the DC Water repeatedly proposed changes to its repair plans, which forced National Park Service to restart its environmental assessments. And as I said, if you got, you know -- so all water goes to the lowest point, so that is -- so we always have to protect Mammoth Cave, but it gets to the point where you are looking at what we saw as a disastrous failure versus -- and I am a tree person -- versus trees and vegetation.

So would you want to talk about that article? And was it fair in saying that there would seem to be some minor environmental concerns seemed to delay repair, what became a major environmental concern? Would you like to comment on that? That is the way I read it.

*Mr. Wenschhof. Thank you. Thank you for your question.

So we review applications for projects and the environmental assessment review timeline begins when we have a clear and complete and well-defined proposal to review, which has a clear goal and can be meaningfully evaluated.

*The Chair. Well, it sounded like the water would

propose -- you would give a permit, give them some changes -- they would make a change, and then restart the process. Is that what happens?

And so it just seemed like, from what I have read and studied, that everybody knew this needed to be fixed. We just could never get to a place to get the permit to fix it. Is that a fair statement of what happened?

*Mr. Wenschhof. Well, the process can accommodate some design changes after it begins, but if there's a wholesale change in the project scope and goals, that precludes a meaningful analysis and it creates a new --

*The Chair. Well, we moved with speed once it happened, because we saw the result of not getting the permit. So what changes once there is an emergency declared?

*Mr. Wenschhof. Well, once an emergency is declared, like the collapsed pipe --

*The Chair. Right.

*Mr. Wenschhof. -- we were able to -- we worked with DC Water to verbally and via email correspondence to approve their emergency actions within the -- a short timeframe, within that first week so they could return the wastewater flow into the canal prism, per their request.

*The Chair. So obviously, the collapse exposed the problem.

I mean, we were looking -- you could see it. But it

seemed like we could have had some kind of reaction quicker, based on what was going to happen, what we thought could happen. Did the Park Service just kind of look at it and go, well, we don't think this is going to collapse? And did DC Water say, we think this is critical?

I mean, it gets to the point where -- and it seems we spent a lot of time trying to get a permit, didn't get the permit in time to fix the problem. The problem happens, and it becomes an environmental problem or -- disaster, I guess we could even use those terms. And so I am trying to say, what do we need to fix to say we need to get a permit when we think this is going to happen, not after it happens? How do we do it quicker? And would that be the Corps, or is that through the National Park Service? I think it is the National Park Service is what the hang-up was.

*Mr. Wenschhof. Yeah, for construction permits that are proposed by utilities, those could be from six months to a year for a construction-type permit, a general request. There are others that are identified as high priority where there may be an imminent issue or, in this case --

*The Chair. Was this ever considered imminent? Was it never considered imminent?

I mean, when you were reviewing the permits, was it ever considered an imminent threat to the environment or --

*Mr. Wenschhof. I think the specifics of that situation

are subject to the litigation, the things before the collapse.

*The Chair. Okay. Well, so in general, because I understand, I appreciate that, is that it appears to me, or it appears to a lot of us, that over the want of getting a permit when you are moving -- and I am not dismissing moving trees and vegetation, that is important. Mammoth Cave is as beautiful above ground as it is below, but it gets to a point where you are going to -- there is threats out there, and there needs to be a way to make sure that what we are trying to save doesn't cause a bigger problem down the road environmentally.

It was environmental disaster, so we are trying to save vegetation and trees -- create an environmental disaster down the road. That is what we are trying to fix. That is why we want to get the answers. Is there any comment that you would like to make on that?

*Mr. Wenschhof. Well, yeah. Thank you again.

The Park Service is focused on resource protection over the natural and cultural resources, and we conduct the legally-required compliance that we have to do for historic resources, cultural resources, archeology, tribal consultation, as well as visitor safety.

*The Chair. The pipe -- I understand if I was going to go build a pipe through Mammoth Cave, but the pipe was

already through there. And so they just needed to fix it. That is the problem. And so it gets into all of -- well, I know I am out of time, but that is the frustration. The frustration, from my perspective, is that -- and your people, I just want to finish -- I know I got to yield back -- the people in Kentucky, the Park Service people, are fantastic to work with. I have found that, so I will say that. But it just seems frustrating that we got all these processes and, here we are, people having to deal with the sewage dumped into the river and they are -- you know, it affects their drinking water, and it is frustrating for all of us.

I yield back.

*Mr. Palmer. [Presiding.] The gentleman yields. The chair now recognizes the Ranking Member of the full committee, Mr. Pallone, for five minutes for his questions.

*Mr. Pallone. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Potomac Interceptor collapse is an unfortunate reminder of our aging water infrastructure, much of which desperately needs increased investment to help pay for repairs and system upgrades. And Trump is ignoring these needs and putting our infrastructure at greater risk while prioritizing his ballroom and this latest corrupt slush fund to pay off his followers, including those who stormed the Capitol.

His proposed budget would gut the Clean Water and

Drinking Water State Revolving Funds that provide water assistance with resources to make necessary repairs and improvements. And our water systems need more support, not less. Otherwise, incidents like the Potomac Interceptor collapse will only become more common, and communities will be left cleaning up the mess.

My question is to Ms. Kramer. EPA's last needs assessments collectively found that more than $1.2 trillion is needed to improve and repair our water systems. Is that correct?

*Ms. Kramer. I believe so, yes.

*Mr. Pallone. And then Trump's budget request for the next fiscal year proposes an 86 percent and 90 percent cut for the Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Funds. Is that correct?

*Ms. Kramer. That amount does not include the congressionally-delegated spending.

And also, I think it's important to offer one of the pieces of information that I've learned over the last few weeks is that there is approximately $14.8 billion of excessive uncommitted funds in the both the Drinking Water and the safe -- Drinking Water and Clean Water SRF. And what that means is that the money is getting to the states, but the states aren't getting it out the door.

And so excessive uncommitted funds are determined -- are

categorized as those funds that have been sitting essentially in the state coffers for a year or greater. And so with respect to the amount that we have determined is sitting there, that is a huge priority under Administrator Zeldin's leadership that we are going to work with the states to get that money out the door because it doesn't do any good to get the money to the states if the states aren't actually getting it out to the communities that need it.

*Mr. Pallone. All right, thank you.

Now, EPA's own assessment found water systems need billions more than they currently get. So how are water systems going to make needed capital investments if the President's budget nearly eliminates the EPA program that helped meet that need?

*Ms. Kramer. So I think exactly what I was just talking about, we need to ensure that the money that is in the state coffers and continues to go out to the states actually gets from the state program into the drinking water and wastewater systems' hands. And so we've been doing a robust analysis not only of the Clean Water and Drinking Water SRF, but also of the lead service line replacement grant dollars that have gone out. We're doing the same kind of assessment for the Emerging Contaminants Small and Disadvantaged Communities grant program.

And so ensuring that the dollars that are already there,

the dollars that are ready and able to go out to those communities get there so that they can not only be making those capital improvements that are necessary, but also ensuring that we're pairing that with the technical assistance initiative that I was referencing when I was speaking with the ranking member before about ensuring that communities have the technical, managerial, and financial capability to understand how to apply those funds.

*Mr. Pallone. Well, I appreciate that, and I am not suggesting you shouldn't do that, but I still think that we are never going to get to -- anywhere near this $1.2 trillion that is needed, that you said is needed to improve and repair our water systems.

And, you know, the problem is that Trump's proposals, his cuts, go far beyond simply suggesting cuts. It actually guts some of these programs. So like it or not, you know, if you really want to prevent incidents like the Potomac Interceptor collapse from happening, you just can't cut infrastructure investments.

And I understand you get some of that state money out. I appreciate it, but cutting infrastructure investments, in my opinion, only leads to a future where more of our water systems are at risk and communities are left cleaning up the mess. And I just think that, with -- when you look at Trump's budget, it is not only -- you know, it goes way

beyond whatever money you are going to, you know, get that is already out there. I mean, I think we need more funding if we are ever going to get to address this $1.2 trillion in funding that you say that we need.

So again, I appreciate everybody's input today. This is certainly an important hearing. But there is a lot more that needs to be done. And providing more funding at the Federal level is clearly an important part of that.

So thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

*Mr. Palmer. The gentleman yields. The chair now recognizes the Vice President of the committee, the gentleman from Ohio, Mr. Balderson for five -- I meant Vice Chairman, not Vice President.

*Mr. Balderson. I was going to say --

*Mr. Palmer. I just promoted him.

*Mr. Balderson. I appreciate the promotion, Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

*Mr. Palmer. You are recognized for five minutes.

*Mr. Balderson. Good morning, everyone. Thank you all for being here.

Colonel, I am going to direct my questions to you first. Your testimony notes that the Washington Aqueduct's regional drinking water supply, which produces drinking water for approximately one million people in D.C. and parts of Virginia, remain safe and unaffected since the collapse and

spill was fortunately downstream from Washington Aqueduct's primary water intake at Great Falls.

To help give folks a sense of the intake sites as compared to where the Potomac Interceptor collapse was and spill happened, how far upstream is the Great Falls water intake from where the Potomac Interceptor collapse occurred?

*Colonel Pera. Vice Chairman Balderson, it's about 5.8 miles north of where the spill occurred.

*Mr. Balderson. Thank you. And how far downstream from the collapse is the secondary Little Falls water intake site that was, thankfully, not in use at the time?

*Colonel Pera. Vice Chairman, I believe it's just shy of four miles.

*Mr. Balderson. Perfect, thank you.

Colonel, as we know, the Potomac Interceptor is a 54-mile pipe, much of which runs either along or under portions of the Potomac River. How would safe drinking water be impacted if a break in Potomac Interceptor occurred upstream from the Great Falls and Little Falls intake sites? That's the first question.

And the follow-up is, is there a possibility that the region's drinking water could be impacted?

*Colonel Pera. Vice Chairman, I think the short answer is there is a possibility that the drinking water could be impacted. However, we have had recent events starting in

2024, when a algae bloom happened around July 3. That really kind of set in motion a very cooperative level of communication among water utilities along the breadth of the Potomac River. And as we identify risks to that, what we've learned is that getting the water to a treatable level is a top priority.

When we talk about the amount of time with our water holding, how much time that gives us operationally to, one, stop the water before it enters the intakes; make decisions at that point on how we're going to either have the water flow by the Great Falls intake as it gets to the Little Falls intake and then restore the Great Falls intake, all of those become operational considerations that we can make. I think, for us, this really just kind of pushes to the forefront what Ranking Member Clarke brought up, the idea of the secondary water source.

This -- I would not say a doomsday scenario, but it is a realistic scenario that there could be risk to both intakes. And because we haven't had that situation yet does not mean that it's not possible. And mitigating against that with the secondary source is, obviously, the most direct path. But for right now, it's about controlling the water at the intake, getting it to a treatable level. That means close coordination with the other utilities, with EPA before we start the treatment process.

And then also the investment in the Washington Aqueduct to allow it to move from a conventional treatment process to an advanced treatment process, which allows for an ability to treat more than what it does today through the normal sedimentation, filtration, and disinfection process.

*Mr. Balderson. Well done. Thank you. I appreciate that answer. I have a short time left, but I am going to try to get this last question. In your testimony -- your testimony also notes that the Great Falls intake site was able to provide all the necessary raw water to require to meet water demand at the time of the incident, which was approximately 130 million gallons a day. If a break in wastewater overflow happened upstream from the two intake sites, and the intakes needed to be closed throughout the response effort, how much water storage capacity do we have is the first question; and how long would it be to supply the region with its water needs such as drinking water, fire suppression for D.C., Arlington, Fairfax, and for those two intake sites closed?

*Colonel Pera. Vice Chairman Balderson, when we talk about the secondary approach that Ranking Member Clarke brought up, that added about 54 acre-feet of storage capacity. We're at about 47 acre-feet right now in our reservoir. So we're estimating close to that same 12 hours that we would be getting with that additional expansion of

the reservoir. So it's close to about 12 hours right now. There are some control measures that you can put in through communication, strategic communication on, you know, holding off on water use that we can do through our PAO platforms. But right now it's about 12 hours.

*Mr. Balderson. Okay, well done. Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

*Mr. Palmer. The gentleman yields. The chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Colorado, Ms. DeGette, for five minutes for her question.

*Ms. DeGette. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Wenschhof, the breach we are talking about occurred on Federal land under the control of the National Park Service. Is that correct?

*Mr. Wenschhof. The --

*Ms. DeGette. Yes or no will work.

*Mr. Wenschhof. Yes, the --

*Ms. DeGette. Thank you.

*Mr. Wenschhof. The break occurred on Park --

*Ms. DeGette. And all three of the witnesses today, including you, were informed of the leak on January 19 and the Federal Government was there on January 20. Is that correct?

*Mr. Wenschhof. Yes, for the National --

*Ms. DeGette. Thank you.

*Mr. Wenschhof. -- Park Service.

*Ms. DeGette. Now. So on February 18 -- so the Federal Government was there right away, but on federal -- February 18, Mayor Bowser asked for declaration of a Federal emergency. Is that correct?

*Mr. Wenschhof. I believe that's the case. I --

*Ms. DeGette. Yes.

*Mr. Wenschhof. I don't have that specific --

*Ms. DeGette. Okay. And on February 20, that was when President Trump approved a Federal emergency declaration of emergency. Isn't that correct?

*Mr. Wenschhof. Yes, emergency --

*Ms. DeGette. Now, Ms. Kramer, when that happened it changed the EPA's role from supporting the state efforts to leading the coordinated response. Isn't that correct?

*Ms. Kramer. That's correct.

*Ms. DeGette. Now, I say this because there has been some confusion about who was in charge. And unfortunately, rather than just saying this is Federal land, we are going to coordinate it, the President posted that Maryland Governor Wes Moore was to blame for this incident. But I want to understand how the Federal response was being led.

And I also want to understand what we can do to improve this in the future, because a national event of this significance which endangers public health should not be used

as a political partisan event. So I want to ask a couple more questions.

Ms. Kramer, you talked about -- you testified about the aging infrastructure and the needs assessment, that we have this -- these built-up needs of $1.2 trillion. Is that right?

*Ms. Kramer. Correct.

*Ms. DeGette. And so I hear what you are saying about -- that we need to ensure that money gets out there. And I hear what you are saying, that you are trying to coordinate -- that the states get it out. But at some point you just need enough money. Wouldn't that be fair to say? You can't do something with nothing.

*Ms. Kramer. If the money is not getting out to the communities, it really kind of doesn't matter how much money there is, unfortunately.

*Ms. DeGette. Right, but you need both. You need the money and you need the disbursement, right? If you don't have the money, you can't disburse it.

*Ms. Kramer. And we --

*Ms. DeGette. That is right.

*Ms. Kramer. We do right now.

*Ms. DeGette. Okay.

*Ms. Kramer. And --

*Ms. DeGette. Mr. Wenschhof, I want to ask you. Isn't

it true that in 2018, 8 years ago, DC Water requested fast-track permits to repair widespread corrosion and detached rebar at the site of the rupture?

*Mr. Wenschhof. We've been working with them --

*Ms. DeGette. Yes, it is --

*Mr. Wenschhof. -- on this initiative for a while.

*Ms. DeGette. Yeah, eight years.

*Mr. Wenschhof. The specifics --

*Ms. DeGette. Do you dispute that?

*Mr. Wenschhof. The specifics of the pre-break are under the litigation.

*Ms. DeGette. Okay. In fact, DC Water warned the corrosion could "result in a catastrophic failure leading to the release of raw sewage into soil, groundwater, and waterways.'' Is that right? Do you know if they said that?

*Mr. Wenschhof. I'm not familiar with that quote.

*Ms. DeGette. Okay. Isn't it true that the permits were delayed due to environmental assessments?

*Mr. Wenschhof. Again, I -- that part is -- pre-break is under litigation, and I'm not --

*Ms. DeGette. Okay.

*Mr. Wenschhof. -- able to talk about --

*Ms. DeGette. At the time of the pipe rupture, those EAs still had not been completed. Is that right?

*Mr. Wenschhof. I defer to my prior answer.

*Ms. DeGette. Well, I know it is under litigation, but you can -- I can tell you at the time of pipe rupture there were still environmental assessments that were not completed. I know there is litigation. I am not asking you to talk about any sensitive information, but -- and I am a lawyer. But that is the fact.

And, Mr. Chairman, I would like to -- unanimous consent to place in the record an article from the Washington Post dated April 2, 2026, which is entitled, "Catastrophic Sewage Spill Followed Years of Delay on Repairs Post Review Finds.''

*Mr. Joyce. [Presiding.] So ordered.

[The information follows:]

**********COMMITTEE INSERT**********

*Ms. DeGette. Thank you. So let me just say eight years is too long to wait for an environmental assessment. And I say this in a non-partisan way, because over those eight years we had Democratic and Republican administrations.

And one thing, Mr. Chairman, we need to do is we need to figure out how to speed up environmental assessments so that we can make sure we don't have these kinds of ruptures that are endangering public health. And with that I yield back.

*Mr. Joyce. The gentlelady yields. The chair now recognizes Mr. Palmer for his five minutes of questioning.

*Mr. Palmer. For the benefit of the committee, the EPA expended $6.2 billion for water and wastewater systems in 2025 of the 50-plus billion that was in the Infrastructure Investment Act, which brought the total expended up to 31, a little over 31 billion, I think.

Ms. Kramer, Mr. Wenschhof, Colonel Pera, were any of you made aware of the risk of potential collapse on the Potomac Interceptor line prior to the collapse?

*Ms. Kramer. No.

*Colonel Pera. No.

*Mr. Wenschhof. No.

*Mr. Palmer. So no one talked to you about -- that there were potential breaches, that the line had been degraded, and that repairs were needed because there was a potential breach? So you all answer no.

When did you learn that there was a problem? Was it before or after the breakdown of the line?

Ms. Kramer?

*Ms. Kramer. EPA was notified on the evening of January 19.

*Mr. Palmer. So after the breach.

*Ms. Kramer. Correct.

*Mr. Palmer. Colonel Pera?

*Colonel Pera. The Army Corps of Engineers, via the Washington Aqueduct, was notified on the evening of January 19 by WSSE.

*Mr. Palmer. Mr. Wenschhof?

*Mr. Wenschhof. The National Park Service was advised on the evening of the 19 through the U.S. Park Police.

*Mr. Palmer. Should you have been informed that there was a potential breach, that the line was so degraded that there was potential for a breach in the line, Ms. Kramer?

*Ms. Kramer. I believe that there was a reconstruction plan that had previously been --

*Mr. Palmer. No, I am asking you because if you had knowledge of a construction plan, that would indicate that you knew there was a potential for a problem. You said that you didn't know that. So what I am asking now is, because you didn't -- you testified you didn't know, should you have been informed prior to this?

*Ms. Kramer. Me, personally, probably. Yes.

*Mr. Palmer. Colonel Pera?

*Colonel Pera. I believe, as part of the Washington Aqueduct working as part of the water community and working with members of the wholesale customer board, I believe there is a standing -- there is an understanding that if anything was threatening the water supply, that that would --

*Mr. Palmer. You should have been informed.

*Colonel Pera. Yes, sir.

*Mr. Palmer. Mr. Wenschhof, this is particularly important with you. You testified that you were not informed, you were not made aware of potential problems or the potential breach of the line. Should you have been informed prior to the -- to that happening?

*Mr. Wenschhof. As I mentioned in my testimony, we've been working on a lot of initiatives with DC Water over the last several years. I would have to take questions --

*Mr. Palmer. At any point --

*Mr. Wenschhof. -- back to follow up on --

*Mr. Palmer. -- did they tell you that a --

*Mr. Wenschhof. -- specifics.

*Mr. Palmer. -- that the line was so degraded that there was a -- the potential for a breach?

*Mr. Wenschhof. Not a potential for a breach. We're working on rehabilitation permits.

*Mr. Palmer. Okay, I think this is the famous movie line of "failure to communicate,'' because this could have been avoided, had everyone been -- on this panel been informed and had the opportunity to take some action, either the funding if funding was necessary -- I don't know that funding was needed for this, but action was certainly needed, and coordination with relevant parties. But it didn't happen.

Administrator Kramer, what actions has the EPA taken to respond to the release of sewage from the Potomac Interceptor, particularly in the river?

*Ms. Kramer. EPA itself did a number of actions pursuant to the emergency declaration. EPA provided technical assistance on site, EPA conducted contaminated soil removal. EPA also conducted water quality sampling as well as soil sampling.

*Mr. Palmer. But we still have some problems. Do you have a potential timeline for getting this cleaned up?

*Ms. Kramer. So the remediation of all areas except for the C&O canal itself, which still has some -- I believe still has a limited amount of remaining contaminated soil in it, the remainder of the area that was impacted has been fully remediated, and Federal assets have been fully demobilized.

*Mr. Palmer. What is your level of satisfaction with the response from state and local partners? Be candid.

*Ms. Kramer. I -- previous to coming -- and I'm cognizant of your time, but previous to coming to EPA, I was the deputy secretary at Florida's Department of Environmental Protection. We had a break in a main. And as deputy secretary, I had deployed my assistant deputy secretary to be on site at the break location almost every day until the bypass was installed and there was no longer raw sewage that was leaking. I felt in my capacity in that position, that that was the appropriate amount of attention and detail that needed -- was needed in that situation.

I found it very interesting that Maryland, given that they have jurisdiction over the Clean Water Act -- section 402, specifically, they have primacy -- so any unpermitted discharges into Waters of the United States, such as what happened here, I found it interesting that, at least what I was aware of, it was not that level of attention.

*Mr. Palmer. Thank you for your responses.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

*Mr. Joyce. The gentleman yields. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from New York, Mr. Tonko, for his five minutes of questioning.

*Mr. Tonko. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

During emergencies it is critical that the Federal Government provide accurate and timely information to the public. Unfortunately, this administration has a history of

doing the opposite, including after the collapse of a segment of the Potomac Interceptor. Less than one month after the collapse, President Trump took to social media to hurl insults and baseless accusations at his political opponents. At the time, DC Water and its Federal partners were still in the early stages of their response.

Mr. Chair, I request unanimous consent to enter into the record these February 16 and February 17 of 2026 Truth Social post from President Trump.

*Mr. Joyce. So ordered.

[The information follows:]

**********COMMITTEE INSERT**********

*Mr. Tonko. I appreciate that. I would like to go through some of what the President thought was important and appropriate to say at this time and see if your understanding of the facts lines up with his.

Ms. Kramer, you were assigned as EPA's senior response officer for the Potomac Interceptor collapse a few days after the President's tirade. In his February 17 post, President Trump said that, and I quote, "This is a radical left-caused environmental hazard.'' Is that EPA's position that the radical left caused the 60-year-old pipe to collapse?

*Ms. Kramer. I've spoken a lot about asset management, but I do think what I was just speaking about with respect to Maryland and the lack of high-level oversight that I was aware of, I do think that there was a lapse there of awareness and presence by the State of Maryland.

*Mr. Tonko. But to blame the radical left for the corrosion or calcification of the collapse?

*Ms. Kramer. One of the things that we're doing in the Office of Water right now -- and I've spoken a little bit about it, but I will take just a second to get more into it -- I've spoken a lot about making sure that the money is getting where it needs to be, out to the communities.

One of the other things that I learned coming into this office was that technical assistance in the prior administration, dollars were awarded and scores were given

out for technical assistance providers with an extra set of points given to folks that came in that had never had experience in the process. And so I think there was a lapse of judgment in the prior administration, as well, in terms of ensuring that the right people were getting the folks to provide training and technical assistance to these systems that is necessary to --

*Mr. Tonko. Okay, to --

*Ms. Kramer. -- to conduct this type of oversight.

*Mr. Tonko. Yeah, I think it is somewhat of a stretch.

Did the President consult with EPA or anyone else involved in responding to the Potomac Interceptor collapse before he started pointing the finger at his political opponents without evidence?

*Ms. Kramer. I'm not aware of conversations that occurred.

*Mr. Tonko. Okay. Thank you. At a March 18 press conference you stated that -- and I quote -- "This has been a coordinated response from the beginning.'' So could you elaborate on EPA's involvement beginning with the time of the collapse?

*Ms. Kramer. Absolutely. So initially, EPA received notification on January 19 that the collapse had occurred. Inspectors and staff from our region 3 office were on site the next day, January 20, after -- and provided kind of the

general oversight that EPA provides under -- even though Maryland has primacy over these unpermitted discharges within their jurisdiction to Waters of the United States, EPA maintains an oversight role. So we were providing kind of that more traditional oversight after Mayor Bowser requested the emergency declaration and that was granted by the -- or authorized by the President and I was designated as senior response officer.

We started using what is kind of the typical -- what I would say is kind of the typical process, where FEMA -- and Colonel Pera spoke to it earlier -- FEMA provides mission assignments and then, you know, that's how we kind of fulfill and obligate out which agencies are doing what, scope of work, mission assignment, potential costs, approval process.

*Mr. Tonko. Okay, reclaiming my time because we have very little here.

At the same press conference you stated that, I quote, "Public communication has been critical to transparency and restoring public confidence.'' Did the President's post on Truth Social provide any benefit to the cleanup efforts or restoring public confidence?

*Ms. Kramer. It certainly brought attention to the issue, and made clear that the Federal Government was going to be stepping up to the plate.

*Mr. Tonko. That statement ensured that the Federal

Government would be involved? I thought it was condemnation, really. How did it show confidence and restore public support?

*Ms. Kramer. The Truth Social post indicates that it had gotten the attention of the highest levels of government in this country, and there were going to be Federal actions that would be approved. The emergency declaration --

*Mr. Tonko. Okay.

*Ms. Kramer. -- requested by Mayor Bowser would be authorized.

*Mr. Tonko. Sorry, my time.

Mr. Wenschhof, the President called this a sewer line breach in Maryland, and blamed one of the political rivals, the governor of Maryland. But the breach actually occurred on Federal land under the control of the National Park Service. Is that not correct?

*Mr. Wenschhof. Yeah, the Potomac Interceptor is located on National Park Service land.

*Mr. Tonko. Yes, well, hurling insults and accusations during an emergency simply don't help anyone or actually fix the problem. It is shameful, I think, that the President repeatedly used emergencies and crises as opportunities to try to score political points, rather than help the people and fulfill the obligations of his office.

And with that, Mr. Chair, I yield back.

*Mr. Joyce. The gentleman yields. The chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Tennessee, Dr. Harshbarger, for her five minutes of questioning.

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Wenschhof, for any type of infrastructure that traverses NPS property, what types of permits are needed to access or interact with this infrastructure, and what does the process look like?

*Mr. Wenschhof. Okay. The -- well, some utilities pre-exist park land, as I mentioned in my testimony, which is the case with the Potomac Interceptor. In general, the two types of permits that a utility would have would either be a right-of-way permit and a special use permit. The right-of-way permit that is issued generally governs the footprint of the utility, the size and depth, and, you know, the area that it takes up on Federal land, and defines that and permits it for a period of 10 years.

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Okay.

*Mr. Wenschhof. A special use permit is issued for construction activities and actions that will disturb park resources, park visitors, I'd say traffic, disturb the soil, any type of construction activity.

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Yes. Well, does the process differ depending on what type of infrastructure project it is, or is

this the process most of the time?

*Mr. Wenschhof. Well, the -- a general construction permit that's going to involve substantial disturbance to the park would --

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Yes.

*Mr. Wenschhof. -- may take 6 to 12 months, but we have shortened timelines if we have an urgently high priority -- urgent matter or an emergency situation.

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Is the permitting process different from an applicant that has already participated in the process before and is submitting a permit for the same site or location?

*Mr. Wenschhof. It would be the same process with each new proposal or rescoped project.

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Okay. All right. Does NPS have an internal expedited or emergency NEPA procedure for critical infrastructure on Park Service land, like an internal expedited or emergency NEPA procedure?

*Mr. Wenschhof. Yes. We --

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Okay.

*Mr. Wenschhof. In the case of the response, that's how we're doing the NEPA after the fact.

*Mrs. Harshbarger. So was this expedited or emergency process ever considered with respect to the portion of pipe that collapsed? And if it was, why? And if not, why not?

*Mr. Wenschhof. It was for the collapse.

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Okay.

*Mr. Wenschhof. Yeah, we verbally authorized their initial remedial actions while we worked on the permit and compliance after the fact --

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Okay.

*Mr. Wenschhof. -- of the emergency situation.

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Yeah, permitting always gets in the way, doesn't it?

Assistant Administrator Kramer, how did the issuance of an emergency declaration allow for increased access to resources in a more expedited cleanup process?

*Ms. Kramer. On the resources front it allowed for additional deployment under FEMA's kind of standard normal process. Again, back to the mission assignments and scope of work and funding and the split of 75 percent versus 25 percent cost-share.

In terms of what it allowed us to do on site, it allowed us to undertake remediation actions concurrently with the emergency repair that was happening with the collapse. Had there not been the access to Federal resources, both dollars and people, the cleanup was projected to go sequentially as opposed to concurrently. And so we were able to move much more quickly.

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Okay. Very good.

Well, Mr. Chairman, I yield back on that.

*Mr. Joyce. The gentlelady yields. The chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from New York, Ms. Ocasio-Cortez, for five minutes of questioning.

*Ms. Ocasio-Cortez. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Assistant Administrator Kramer, you are in charge of the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Water, correct?

*Ms. Kramer. Correct.

*Ms. Ocasio-Cortez. And in your written testimony you communicated a value that I think we all appreciate, which is that a top priority for EPA is ensuring continued drinking water safety. Right?

*Ms. Kramer. Correct.

*Ms. Ocasio-Cortez. And this is a bedrock foundational value of the EPA, and it's one of the big reasons why it exists.

I, you know, I -- and I also appreciate your commitment to clean water specifically. In fact, you said it very well on a MAHA action call just last month that, "When I turn the tap on and when every American turns the tap on, there should be confidence in what is in your drinking water.'' And I think that is a value that we all share.

I wanted to ask you while I have you here if you have been receiving complaints or if you are aware of folks

reaching out about data center construction impact on drinking water quality.

*Ms. Kramer. I am aware.

*Ms. Ocasio-Cortez. You are aware. And what are some of the things that you are seeing and hearing?

*Ms. Kramer. So one of, I think, the biggest concerns is related to water availability, which is why we recently relaunched the Water Reuse Action Plan 2.0 to focus on ensuring that whether it's data centers --

*Ms. Ocasio-Cortez. Anything about water quality, though?

*Ms. Kramer. I'm not aware of that.

*Ms. Ocasio-Cortez. Okay. Are there any complaints -- I mean, are you observing any negative impacts on -- data center construction on water quality for Americans?

*Ms. Kramer. I don't think anything like that's been raised to my attention.

*Ms. Ocasio-Cortez. Okay. I would like to do so. A few weeks ago, while Congress was in recess, I visited Morgan County, Georgia, where Meta is building a massive data center campus. They are clear-cutting forests and began heavy construction, including explosive blasting. And families in the area are starting to see not only their water pressure decrease -- to your point about water availability -- but their appliances are all -- have all stopped working because

it is decimating their water quality. They now rely on bottled water to drink and prepare meals. And nearby residents' water bills are expected to increase by 33 percent.

In fact, I have a jar right here. This is the current drinking water in Morgan County, Georgia right after a data center was constructed, the Meta data center was constructed. The only difference between the clean water and this was that data center.

I have another one, as well. So this wasn't just one well. This wasn't just one family's situation. This is what the drinking water now looks like next to that data center. And I think both of us can agree that neither one of these things are drinkable. These families now have to ship -- in a rural area have to ship water to their house in order to cook and bathe themselves.

Now, I am curious if the EPA plans any investigations on how data centers are affecting water quality and availability. I understand what you said about the rule, but are there going to be any open investigations on this issue?

*Ms. Kramer. So as soon as I get back to the office, I will be looking into exactly what you've just talked about --

*Ms. Ocasio-Cortez. Okay.

*Ms. Kramer. -- because anywhere, whether it is -- whether -- whatever type of construction it is, it is a

priority to ensure that water quality standards established by EPA are being met. And so we'll be looking into that, certainly.

*Ms. Ocasio-Cortez. Thank you. I sincerely appreciate that, because I think this is of utmost importance, and we are seeing this happening across the country.

I would also like to ask about the Administration's push to build more data centers by fast-tracking construction because the Administration has been issuing executive orders to fast-track data center construction when we know that water quality is encountering major issues. Are there any mandates for data centers to do water quality testing prior to construction?

*Ms. Kramer. Of -- like, coming from a public water supply, drinking water supply sampling?

*Ms. Ocasio-Cortez. Wells, yeah.

*Ms. Kramer. I'm not aware of anything like that. However, it doesn't mean -- I'm just not aware of it. It might exist, but --

*Ms. Ocasio-Cortez. Yes --

*Ms. Kramer. -- I'm not --

*Ms. Ocasio-Cortez. Of course. You know, I think it is important that, you know, you, as an agency official, we have to make sure we are doing these investigations, and then us on a congressional level. I would like to note that I think

it is of utmost importance that we also launch congressional investigations into this matter, as well, so that we can partner with the EPA and ensure that the drinking water for this country continues to be safe and accessible for the American people. So thank you, Administrator.

*Ms. Kramer. Thank you.

*Mrs. Harshbarger. [Presiding.] The gentlewoman yields back and I now recognize Representative Weber for his five minutes of questioning.

*Mr. Weber. Thank you ma'am.

Thank you all for being here today. So I am trying to get caught up on this, what has happened. January the 19th was the failure date. Is that correct?

*Ms. Kramer. Correct.

*Mr. Weber. Okay. How long have you all been engaged? We will start with you, Ms. Kramer.

*Ms. Kramer. So EPA was on site -- EPA received the notification phone call the evening of January 19.

*Mr. Weber. Colonel?

*Colonel Pera. The Washington Aqueduct of the Baltimore District received a call on the evening of the 19th and responded within the hour.

*Mr. Weber. Same for you all, Mr. Wenschhof?

*Mr. Wenschhof. National Park Service has been engaged since the 19th, as well.

*Mr. Weber. Okay. So last night there was a town hall meeting last night at 7:00 p.m. Did any of you all get to attend that?

*Ms. Kramer. No.

*Colonel Pera. No.

*Mr. Weber. So it was called -- and I am just -- I am trying to come up to speed on this, so please don't take exception to what I am asking. This is DC Water's -- off their website.

So I go back to you, Mr. Wenschhof. As you know, the Potomac Interceptor crosses multiple jurisdictions throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia, with maintenance and operational authority vested in DC Water. However, the location of the collapse, a you are probably painfully aware of, happened on National Park Service property. With this in mind, what was your relationship, working relationship, with DC Water before the fact and now?

*Mr. Wenschhof. We have an ongoing continuing working relationship with DC Water, both before and continuing now with current projects and the current remediation for the collapse.

*Mr. Weber. Same question to you, Colonel, and then we will come over to her.

*Colonel Pera. Representative, DC Water is a member of our wholesale customer board, so they are one of three

downstream recipients of the water that's produced from the Washington Aqueduct. And as a result of that, they weigh in on decisions, on investment decisions at the Washington Aqueduct, and are a contributor to the funding of the operations and the capital improvements at the Washington Aqueduct.

*Mr. Weber. Okay, ma'am, Ms. Kramer.

*Ms. Kramer. So when it comes to DC Water's Blue Plains facility, EPA is the NPDES permitting authority under the Clean Water Act.

*Mr. Weber. Are you finding that as you are trying to do -- repair routine sections of the pipe in your particular jurisdiction, are you finding that a problem to have that kind of job where you are reaching across the aisle, so to speak? Do you just stick in your district, sticking in -- making routine pipe repairs? Who handles that job and decides who does what?

We will go with you, Colonel.

*Colonel Pera. Representative, for the Washington Aqueduct, our relationship with the D.C. -- with DC Water is limited to the infrastructure of the aqueduct. It doesn't include this sanitary pipeline that's considered to be the Potomac Interceptor. So for us, that would be between DC Water and the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission.

*Mr. Weber. Okay. Is it Wenschhof, is that how you say

that?

*Mr. Wenschhof. Wenschhof.

*Mr. Weber. Wenschhof. That was my next guess.

*Mr. Wenschhof. Yes, sir. The National Park Service is the landowner for about 23 miles of where the Potomac Interceptor lies after it crosses the river from Virginia, so we have the responsibilities of a landowner for permitting and protecting the national park's resources.

*Mr. Weber. Okay, thank you.

And I am going to go back to you, Administrator Kramer. Thanks for your efforts in coordinating a smooth and dynamic environmental response to that collapse. In your experience, would you say that that particular Potomac Interceptor collapse and the subsequent contamination of the Potomac River -- would you say that constitutes an environmental disaster?

*Ms. Kramer. Yes.

*Mr. Weber. What is to be done about that?

*Ms. Kramer. I think that we took all remediation actions for the immediate collapse. I think that forward looking, not just with DC Water but dealing with water infrastructure across this country, there needs to be an increased focus on physical infrastructure management. Water systems right now across this country are facing challenges with aging infrastructure.

And so under President Trump's leadership EPA is stepping up to the plate. In the Office of Water we are undertaking actions through our technical assistance programs to engage with communities and water systems, specifically to start thinking about how they approach asset management looking forward, ensuring that vulnerabilities that exist are identified and dealt with on a timely basis to ensure that collapses like these don't actually occur.

*Mr. Weber. Had you ever seen a bottle like Representative Ocasio-Cortez showed you?

*Ms. Kramer. I have, yes.

*Mr. Weber. You have seen that?

*Ms. Kramer. Yes.

*Mr. Weber. From that particular facility?

*Ms. Kramer. No, not from that particular facility. From a different -- from my days in the State of Wisconsin, working for the Department of Natural Resources. I have seen water that looks like that.

*Mr. Weber. So you were a cheesehead?

*Ms. Kramer. I still am a cheesehead.

*Mr. Weber. Okay, just checking.

Colonel Pera, I am going to come to you real quick, if I can. Thank you and your team for limiting the impacts of that collapse and aiding in remediation. In your testimony you highlighted U.S. Army Corps's response to the emergency

declaration in the wake -- I want you to -- in writing, because my time is up -- give me an explanation of how the challenges of rapidly constructing a diversion system during the height of winter. If you would respond in writing.

[The information follows:]

**********COMMITTEE INSERT**********

*Mr. Weber. Mr. Chair, I will yield back.

*Mr. Joyce. [Presiding.] The gentleman yields. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Allen, for his five minutes of questioning.

*Mr. Allen. Colonel, I will let you answer that question.

*Colonel Pera. Representative Allen, Representative Weber, there was obviously extreme challenges for us in that diversion system installation. This was happening at the end of the winter, so you have to imagine that up to that point everything had been frozen.

On that Sunday evening we were -- the Presidential declaration was on the 20th, which was a Friday. By Sunday night rain was coming in, and rain was the threat, right? That was the threat of inundating the pumping system that was used for the bypass. So we really had probably about 24 hours to, one, identify the scope, identify the materials, and then give our contractor direction to get the system installed.

We had to prioritize the action. We had a 12-point system. We prioritized four components of that system that allowed us to get at least those portions of the diversion system in place by the evening of the 22nd.

*Mr. Allen. Wow. Wow. Well, thank you, sir. And again, to go back, I want to thank Dr. Joyce for holding this

important hearing on this Potomac Interceptor collapse. And I want to thank the witnesses for being here today.

Assistant Administrator Kramer, based on EPA's observation of the collapse site and the facts that have been shared with it to date, what was the EPA's initial assessment as to what may have caused or contributed to this collapse of the Potomac Interceptor?

*Ms. Kramer. Unfortunately, due to the ongoing litigation, I am unable to answer that question.

*Mr. Allen. Okay, and so you probably can't answer what you have learned to date to -- since this initial assessment.

*Ms. Kramer. That's correct sir.

*Mr. Allen. Okay.

*Ms. Kramer. Apologies.

*Mr. Allen. All right, okay. Can you answer this? By your estimate, how long will it take to fully rehabilitate the area impacted by this incident?

*Ms. Kramer. The -- so from the collapse itself?

*Mr. Allen. Yes.

*Ms. Kramer. I feel confident that, with the exception of the minimal soil -- contaminated soil removal that is still ongoing by DC Water in the C&O Canal -- there's an amount of contaminated soil removal that's still ongoing -- the remaining area of impact from the overflow has been successfully remediated at this time.

*Mr. Allen. Okay, all right. Good, thank you.

Mr. Wenschhof, what is the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, also known as the C&O Canal, and how has it been utilized following this incident?

*Mr. Wenschhof. Can you repeat the last part?

*Mr. Allen. Yes. Yes, sir. What is the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, also known as the C&O Canal, and how has it been utilized following the incident?

*Mr. Wenschhof. Thank you for repeating it.

Yeah, the C&O Canal Park, the main trail, which is referred to as the towpath, parallels the canal for 184 miles. That remained open during the -- during this remediation and the emergency response.

The -- we had to close the area around the canal prism, the channel that held the wastewater for the bypass, for safety. That area was fenced out. And then the other remediation zones that have been spoken of on the panel were closed just for the cleaning of the soil and debris.

*Mr. Allen. Okay. What type of remediation will be needed to restore the C&O Canal after this incident?

*Mr. Wenschhof. DC Water and their contractors are taking on that work now to remediate the channel, which has been removal of the contaminated sediment, sewage-contaminated sediment, and vegetation, and any of the clay liner that had been impacted, which they will have to be

restoring, and they are working on that --

*Mr. Allen. All right.

*Mr. Wenschhof. -- as well as cleaning the historic stone locks. There are four of them.

*Mr. Allen. Another issue that has happened dealing with water pressure, there are certain times of day that you cannot take a shower in the D.C. district because there is not enough water pressure to pull up the thing to hold -- so you shower will produce water. I probably caught you off guard with that, but are you aware of that problem, any of you? And what can be done about it?

*Ms. Kramer. I am unaware of that problem, but will look into it as soon as we leave this hearing today.

*Mr. Allen. Okay, great. Thank you so much.

And Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

*Mr. Joyce. The gentleman yields. Seeing that there are no further members wishing to ask questions, I would like to thank our witnesses again for being here today. We will take a quick five-minute recess to allow the witness table to be set for the second panel.

[Recess.]

*Mr. Joyce. The committee will come back to order.

We want to thank our witnesses for being here today and taking time to testify before the subcommittee.

You will have the opportunity to give an opening

statement, followed by a round of questions from members.

Our witnesses today are David Gadis, chief executive officer and general manager, DC Water; Tom Neltner, national director of Unleaded Kids.

We appreciate you both being here, and I look forward to hearing from you.

You are aware that the committee is holding an oversight hearing and, when doing so, has the practice of taking the testimony under oath. Do you have any objections to testifying under oath?

Seeing no objection, we will proceed. The chair advises you that you are entitled to be advised by counsel, pursuant to House rules. Do you desire to be advised by counsel during your testimony today?

Seeing none, please rise. Please raise your right hand.

[Witnesses sworn.]

*Mr. Joyce. Seeing the witnesses answer in the affirmative, you are now sworn in under oath, subject to the penalties set forth in title 18, section 1001 of the United States Code.

With that I will now recognize Mr. David Gadis for five minutes to give an opening statement.

STATEMENT OF DAVID GADIS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER AND GENERAL MANAGER, DC WATER; AND TOM NELTNER, NATIONAL DIRECTOR, UNLEADED KIDS

STATEMENT OF DAVID GADIS

*Mr. Gadis. Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today. I am David Gadis, chief executive officer and general manager of DC Water, and I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the January 19 collapse of the Potomac Interceptor and the response that followed.

The Potomac Interceptor collapse was a serious and deeply significant event for our region, our environment, and the communities that we serve. While this incident does not define DC Water's decades-long record of environmental stewardship and infrastructure investment, it does demand accountability, reflection, and also continued action: responsibilities we fully embrace.

From the outset, our commitment has been not only to respond aggressively, but also to communicate transparently, work collaboratively, and learn from this event as we continue strengthening our systems for the future. We understand the public's concern, the frustration, and the difficult questions many have asked, including whether this

event could have been prevented. Those are critical questions. And as a leader of this organization, I believe it is my responsibility to ensure we answer them candidly, transparently, and with humility.

At its core, this incident is about aging infrastructure in America. The 54-mile Potomac Interceptor was constructed by the Federal Government in the 1960s, before the many -- before many of today's construction standards existed and long before modern inspection technologies were available. Like many utilities across the country, DC Water is responsible for maintaining infrastructure built generations ago that remains essential to public health and environmental protection. That reality does not lessen our responsibility; it actually heightens that responsibility.

On January 19 DC Water discovered a significant failure in the interceptor near the Potomac River. Under extremely challenging winter conditions, our teams immediately mobilized to contain the release of -- and protect the public health and the environment. Working alongside the EPA and NPS, the Army Corps of Engineers, FEMA, and numerous state, district, and local partners, DC Water successfully implemented an emergency bypass system on January 24 that prevented nearly two billion additional gallons from entering the river.

As engineers gained access to the damaged pipe, we

encountered large boulders and debris weighing approximately 18 tons -- that is roughly equivalent to 10 full passenger vehicles -- located in the adjacent -- and also impacted the sections of this pipe. These materials obstructed flow within the interceptor, and likely contributed to the structural stress on the pipeline over many decades.

I want to personally thank our government partners for the extraordinary coordination and collaboration throughout this response, particularly EPA Assistant Administrator Jessica Kramer for her leadership during this incident.

I also want to directly address the question of whether DC Water was aware of the concerns regarding this section of the pipe prior to the collapse. The answer is yes, and that is precisely why this section of the interceptor has already been identified -- had already been identified for rehabilitation. It had been part of our long-range capital improvement planning process for several years, and construction permitting discussions were well underway before the collapse occurred.

Since the collapse, extensive water and also sediment testing conducted by DC Water and numerous partner agencies and stakeholders has verified that river water quality returned to normal many weeks ago. Today DC Water is accelerating inspection, monitoring, and also rehabilitation efforts along the interceptor, going beyond standard industry

practices. We are prioritizing vulnerable sections of the pipe more aggressively and proactively than ever before.

DC Water remains committed to addressing this incident responsibly and continuing the long-term work required to strengthen the resilience of the systems our communities depend on every day. This hearing is an important part of that accountability, and we welcome it. Our focus remains where it has been since January 19: protecting public health and the environment, restoring the impacted area, assessing what occurred, and ensuring we apply every lesson learned from this event.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to answering your questions today.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Gadis follows:]

**********COMMITTEE INSERT**********

*Mr. Joyce. Thank you.

Mr. Neltner, you are now recognized for five minutes for your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF TOM NELTNER

*Mr. Neltner. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Tom Neltner. I'm the national director of Unleaded Kids, which is a non-profit dedicated to reducing children's exposure to lead from all sources.

I am a chemical engineer and an attorney. I've worked for Dow Corning and Eli Lilly making drugs, pesticides, food additives, industrial chemicals. I was also an assistant commissioner at the Indiana Department of Environmental Management focused on pollution prevention, recycling, and small business compliance assistance. For the past 25 years my focus has been on children's health, and that included in the aughts working on trying to reduce sewer overflows back in Indiana to protect those children. It's a privilege to talk to you today to examine the conditions that led to the Potomac Interceptor collapse. I regularly enjoy the river for recreation, and I appreciate your efforts to get it cleaned up, and your oversight.

The Potomac Interceptor collapse that released 240 million gallons of raw sewage was an extraordinary event, but it was not an isolated incident. EPA estimates that these type of incidents, euphemistically called sanitary sewer overflows, occur 23,000 to 75,000 times each year, resulting in releases of 3 billion to 10 billion gallons of untreated

sewage. The vast majority of those are smaller than 100,000 gallons. But for the small creek where the kids are out looking for tadpoles or for the swimming hole where the families are playing like I used to, the riverside trail where you're taking a stroll, the backyards where the pets roam, or the lake which -- the community relies on for drinking water, in those places, when these overflows occur the raw sewage can be overwhelming. Everything that's flushed down the toilet shows up on the trees, on the -- floats on the water, or shows up on the grass. It is overwhelming to those communities.

These sewage overflows often result from aging infrastructure, similar to what happened on the Potomac Interceptor collapse. They also occur because these sewer systems were built -- 1950s and 1960s, and they're so old that they weren't designed for extreme weather events and the resulting flooding.

While effective coordinated responses to minimize the impact and control the damage and clean up the damage from sewer overflows are essential, the priority should be on preventing the events, big and small, from happening to the greatest extent practicable. That means strong regulatory oversight by EPA and states, as well as vigilance by the municipal sewage treatment systems.

It also means investments in the infrastructure

necessary to enable water systems to take actions to prevent overflows. Congress does that in three ways: through WIFIA, the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act; and for other systems, smaller systems and rural systems, you'll see it with the Clean Water SRF, the State Revolving Loan Fund, or the Drinking Water SRF. Those investments help communities address aging infrastructure, meet regulatory requirements, and support economic growth.

Based on EPA's most recent Clean Watersheds Needs Survey, communities need $630 billion over the next 20 years, with $110 billion specifically required to repay -- repair aging sewers just like the Potomac Interceptor. The need is similarly huge for drinking water systems, where systems need $625 billion to ensure communities have safe tap water. Given the need, I was dismayed to see EPA's fiscal year 2026 budget proposal last year asking Congress to cut those funds by more than 86 percent. Thank goodness that Congress enacted a budget that rejected those cuts.

I had hoped that with this Potomac Interceptor collapse, that would serve as a compelling reminder to EPA to restore those funding and not to ask for more cuts. Unfortunately, the agency's fiscal year 2027 budget proposal calls for the same cuts that Congress rejected the year before. Worse, EPA reported only -- spending only 26 percent of the WIFIA funds provided by Congress in fiscal year 2025. That suggests that

staff cutbacks are undermining program success.

Congress needs to increase funding for these critical infrastructure investments and ensure EPA has both the people and the resources necessary to enforce the Clean Water Act. To make that happen, Congress must provide close oversight to fix breakdowns that occur so the agency -- so EPA -- can do its job.

Thanks again for the opportunity to share ideas and concerns. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Neltner follows:]

**********COMMITTEE INSERT**********

*Mr. Joyce. I thank you for your testimony, and we will now move to questioning. I will begin and recognize myself for five minutes.

Mr. Gadis, you stated in your opening statement that you became aware that the -- a -- the problem occurred January 19, that when that breach occurred -- that you were aware. Were you aware prior to that that this was a vulnerable section of the sewage pipe that could face problems?

*Mr. Gadis. Thank you very much for the question.

What we were aware of was back in 2018, when we did apply for and work with NPS --

*Mr. Joyce. Did you recognize the urgency of the vulnerability of this section of the sewage pipe?

*Mr. Gadis. We did not -- what made it what it is today is because of the boulders that fell into the pipe.

*Mr. Joyce. But you just stated in your opening statement that those boulders had been there for a prolonged period of time. Were you aware of the dangerous potential of this area of the pipe?

*Mr. Gadis. No, we were not, because the boulders were outside of the pipe. And when inspecting pipe with CCTV and those --

*Mr. Joyce. What did those inspections show? Could you see rebar that was coming through the pipe? Could you see that there were problems within that pipe?

*Mr. Gadis. That -- the rebar was upstream from where the break occurred.

*Mr. Joyce. And so the pipe that you examined showed it was vulnerable or it was not vulnerable? Because you said that, yes, you were aware in your opening statement. And I am trying to think when that awareness occurred.

*Mr. Gadis. That awareness occurred -- in 2018 is when that awareness occurred.

*Mr. Joyce. And was this a priority to repair this pipe?

*Mr. Gadis. Yes, it was.

*Mr. Joyce. And so what steps were taken, recognizing that this was a vulnerable portion of pipe? What had you done? Had you gone through the permitting process? Just walk us through where you were at this point in time, please.

*Mr. Gadis. Where we were at at this point in time was we did work with NPS. We did submit our permits in order for us to --

*Mr. Joyce. And when were they submitted, please?

*Mr. Gadis. They were submitted in 2018.

*Mr. Joyce. In 2018. And so we are talking six years prior to this break. Is this an inordinate amount of time to wait to see that the permitting was in place to begin the repairs?

*Mr. Gadis. Actually, Congressman, it was eight years

in advance. And we do not control the process. We have to go through the process. We do not -- and so, as a result of that, we did have to --

*Mr. Joyce. Did you raise concerns that there were areas that you wanted to proceed to be able to repair necessary to protect the community?

*Mr. Gadis. Yes, sir.

*Mr. Joyce. And who did you make those concerns aware to?

*Mr. Gadis. To NPS.

*Mr. Joyce. And what was their response?

*Mr. Gadis. The response was that we had to go through the process, which we did go through the process with them.

*Mr. Joyce. And you felt that eight years was satisfactory, to be able to be delayed by that period of time?

*Mr. Gadis. We do not feel that eight years is satisfactory.

*Mr. Joyce. And did you voice that to them?

*Mr. Gadis. We did, and we have.

*Mr. Joyce. And what was their response?

*Mr. Gadis. That we had to go through the process.

*Mr. Joyce. Are there other sections of pipe in the DC Water that have been determined to be either equally bad or maybe even worse that you have addressed so far? And are you

waiting for a prolonged period of time for a response to begin those reparations?

*Mr. Gadis. So what we have done at DC Water to address the rest of the pipe, we have surveyed the 54 miles of pipe and -- with CCTV and LiDAR. And as a result of that, we're also using drones and we're also walking the system.

One of the new things that we're doing to detect if there is a rock on top of the pipe is looking at ground-penetrating radar. And so we have done that, but we have surveyed the entire 54 miles --

*Mr. Joyce. And with that survey, have you changed the scope of the project that you had initially submitted to the National Park Service?

*Mr. Gadis. We have. We have changed our CIP program and put other projects ahead of some of the others that we had submitted. But yes.

*Mr. Joyce. And how many projects have you had to advance because of what you found with these surveys?

*Mr. Gadis. Three.

*Mr. Joyce. And is this because of what occurred on January 19?

*Mr. Gadis. January 19 we had lessons learned. And so because of January 19 we feel that there are three projects that we do need to move forward on.

*Mr. Joyce. And how large are these three projects that

you have put to the top of the list?

*Mr. Gadis. I do not recall, I'm sorry.

*Mr. Joyce. And where are they located?

*Mr. Gadis. I don't have the exact locations --

*Mr. Joyce. Can you find that --

*Mr. Gadis. -- but I can --

*Mr. Joyce. -- and submit that to us?

*Mr. Gadis. I can find that out, and give that to you in a written format.

[The information follows:]

**********COMMITTEE INSERT**********

*Mr. Joyce. And in just the last minute that is remaining, what actions have you taken -- you have talked about lessons learned -- and what actions will you continue to take to ensure that there are no additional failures as what we witnessed in January?

*Mr. Gadis. Well, Congressman, thank you very much for that question.

Let me say first that we take serious what happens in the river. And we've proven that in the District of Columbia with the Anacostia River and also with the Potomac River, with our deep tunnel project.

The actions that we have continued to take -- and we will continue to take them -- is to look at the outside of the pipe versus just on the inside of the pipe. We feel that the boulders and the rocks that I talked about at the -- in my opening statement did contribute to the dam that built up inside of the pipe and did not allow the flow to continue to Blue Plains for that sewer -- sewage water to be processed.

*Mr. Joyce. How confident are you that another collapse like this will not occur?

*Mr. Gadis. You know, Congressman, I think that's a -- that's sort of a hypothetical, and I --

*Mr. Joyce. That is what I am asking you, a hypothetical. With the information, with the drones that you have utilized, with the information that you have in hand

from your investigation, how can we tell the public that another imminent situation like January 19 won't be occurring soon?

*Mr. Gadis. Well, we're hopeful that it -- that we do not have another break like this one, and that is why we're doing all the things that we're doing right now. But there are no guarantees when dealing with an aging infrastructure that's more than 60 years old.

*Mr. Joyce. I thank you for your testimony. I yield now to the Ranking Member, Ms. Clarke, for her five minutes of questions.

*Ms. Clarke. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I thank our panelists for appearing before us today.

Mr. Gadis, I would like to better understand the involvement of the Federal agencies and the response to the collapse. What Federal agencies were involved in the response to the collapse, and when were they first involved?

*Mr. Gadis. The Federal agencies were all notified the day of the collapse. We actually -- Congresswoman, we actually, for about two, two-and-a-half weeks, we at DC Water continued to, after building the bypass -- we built that bypass -- there were no agencies working with us.

Approximately two, two-and-a-half weeks later, the agencies did come around, and we're happy that we were able to get the help that we needed.

*Ms. Clarke. Understood, but you had to do the initial work solo over a two-week period of time.

*Mr. Gadis. That is correct.

*Ms. Clarke. I am thinking about future recovery efforts. What worked in this situation, and what advice would you give to other utilities facing a similar situation?

*Mr. Gadis. I'm sorry, could you repeat that? I'm sorry.

*Ms. Clarke. Sure. I am thinking about future recovery efforts. What worked in this situation, and what advice you would give to other utilities facing similar situations.

You know, across the United States we are talking about aging infrastructure. I happen to come from New York City, and so I am always on the lookout. But I would like to hear from you. You know, what would you say works best here?

*Mr. Gadis. Well, this is a great question because I have -- since this break I have been talking to many of my colleagues throughout the country in different settings. And one of the things that I do speak with them about is continuing the asset management, continuing to use CCTV and LiDAR, but also ground-penetrating radar, as well. And that is something that is not generally used when inspecting the pipe. The pipe is always looked at from the inside versus the outside. And the boulders that were big boulders -- as I said earlier, 18 tons -- were sitting on top of the pipe, and

that did exacerbate the blockage inside of the pipe, and caused the manholes to overflow.

So I would say that those are the things I think that are -- that my colleagues should be looking at throughout the country.

*Ms. Clarke. Let me ask you, you know, there have been a number of sort of extreme weather events. We have even had earthquakes that we have never had before -- or in recent times, let's put it that way. Do you think that there has to be new protocols put in place when we are experiencing these events?

And do you take that into consideration in terms of your surveillance of the infrastructure?

*Mr. Gadis. Well, I think we should take those things into consideration.

I think the other thing that we should take a look at is having redundancy, and that is something that you do not have on a sewer pipe. A water pipe, you can shut the water off.

*Ms. Clarke. Right.

*Mr. Gadis. On a sewer you cannot shut it down. So as a result, to have redundancy, I think, would be fantastic. It would be expensive, but it is something that should be looked at.

And then also sliplining pipes in those areas where you can have redundancy as far as concrete pipe, and then also

sliplining it, and you'll have two types of pipe inside of the pipe, and that would give you redundancy as well.

So I think those are the sort of things that we should be taking a look at in the future.

*Ms. Clarke. Very well. Mr. Neltner, your experience cuts across a few of the issues we have discussed here today: sewer overflows, pollution, remediation. How are communities impacted when sewer overflows occur, and what health risks do they pose?

*Mr. Neltner. Their impact is described by -- everyday enjoyment of the rivers are lost, and the creeks and the streams because, literally, there's toilet paper hanging from the trees. You just -- and it stinks.

But also, the sewage contains pathogens in it, and it often contains industrial wastewater that may have chemicals in it that are discharged on the way to the treatment plant to be treated. But when they're released into the environment like that, they can cause a variety of health effects. It all depends on what's upstream.

But the bottom line is we need to stop the -- we need to go do everything we can to prevent these sanitary sewer overflows.

*Ms. Clarke. So our water systems around the country are already struggling to address sewer overflows, and yet President Trump is proposing massive funding cuts to programs

that help those systems. Are water systems able to conduct necessary repairs and improvements without the funding that President Trump is trying to cut?

*Mr. Neltner. The funding, both WIFIA and the State Revolving Funds, are just essential to making this happen. Large utilities can often, because of their good credit rating, go out and get their own. But for the smaller systems, the rural systems, they just don't have access to these funds, especially as interest rates go up. So we really do need those -- the State Revolving Loan Fund. We also need the WIFIA to be able to provide access to the resources so that the smaller, the middle-sized, even some of the larger cities can take advantage of it.

*Ms. Clarke. Very well.

I yield back, Mr. Chair.

*Mr. Joyce. The gentlelady yields. The chair recognizes the Vice Chair of the committee, Mr. Balderson, for his five minutes of questioning.

*Mr. Balderson. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you both for being here.

Mr. Gadis, I will direct my questions to you, sir. Could you please describe the types of assessments that have been done to evaluate the structural integrity of the Potomac Interceptor?

*Mr. Gadis. Thank you very much for that question,

Congressman.

We at DC Water have been using traditional assessments, which would be CCTV, getting inside the pipe and really trying to figure out if there's any degradation within the pipe. Also we have used LiDAR to look at the areas where it is wet, and that helps us from that standpoint.

We're also -- been using drones, as well as -- one of the things that -- it may seem old school, but we walk that pipe, and so that whole 54 miles, we have been walking that to see if there are any sinkholes, any things that gives us something that we would not be able to see inside of the pipe.

So we have been doing that. And the new piece that we are doing today is the ground penetration to take a look and see if there are any boulders. So we are starting that, as well.

*Mr. Balderson. Okay, thank you. And how often are the assessments done, and are they done by staff there? By whom?

*Mr. Gadis. We do have contractors and we do have staff that both work on this. It also depends on what we -- if we see an area where we think -- and we do see degradation, we do keep an eye on that area as we do our inspections.

*Mr. Balderson. Okay, thank you. As this methods -- are those methods widely accepted, industry standard for assessing wastewater infrastructure? So what you are doing

is a pattern throughout the country?

*Mr. Gadis. Yes, sir. That is correct.

*Mr. Balderson. Thank you. Mr. Gadis, when -- the first time the portion of the Potomac Interceptor that collapsed was assessed and had results showing deteriorating conditions, when was the first time the portion -- when did you first see indications of potential deteriorating conditions?

*Mr. Gadis. My knowledge is -- with my knowledge, for my knowledge, it would have been 2017, 2018 is when we -- is when I was -- when I knew about this, or when we knew about this at DC Water.

*Mr. Balderson. Okay.

*Mr. Gadis. And so that would have been 2017, 2018.

*Mr. Balderson. Thank you. Can you elaborate on the results of that assessment, and who at DC Water was aware of the condition of this section of the Potomac Interceptor?

*Mr. Gadis. That would have been our operations group. I don't know exactly who -- the individuals' names that would have been able to assess that.

*Mr. Balderson. Thank you. Did DC Water conduct additional assessments of the portion of the pipe? First question.

And if so, when was the most recent assessment, and what did it show?

*Mr. Gadis. Yes, we did assessments. We did four additional assessments of this pipe after 2018 because of the condition that we saw the pipe in. So we did continue to assess this area.

*Mr. Balderson. Thank you. Mr. Gadis, are you satisfied with the current progress of the remediation efforts following the Potomac Interceptor collapse?

*Mr. Gadis. Thank you for that question.

I am satisfied with what we've done thus far on the remediation. I think that the communities are very satisfied, as well. So we're moving in the right direction.

*Mr. Balderson. When was the most recent assessment done that you inspected? The most recent assessment, when was it done?

*Mr. Gadis. Oh, we're assessing pipe every single day.

*Mr. Balderson. Every single day.

*Mr. Gadis. Every single day on this 54 -- on the 54-mile pipeline, or the Potomac Interceptor.

*Mr. Balderson. Okay. Is there anything that could have been done differently to expedite the emergency repair or cleanup process or streamline operations?

*Mr. Gadis. Thank you very much for that question.

We -- as we look back at this and lessons learned, I think that we -- when we -- the things that we were able to do regarding this break were the right things. The only

thing that we wish that we could have done would have been have ground penetration, but we did not know that the boulders were there. No one would have known that the boulders were there.

The clean fill should have been put in, and clean fill would be boulders -- or not boulders, but rock that is no larger than three inches in diameter -- would have been placed back on top of this pipe. But the boulders that were placed back on top of the pipe did cause a true problem, and the break was extraordinary versus other breaks that we've seen.

*Mr. Balderson. Okay. I am going to try to get one last question here. Currently, are there any portions along the Potomac Interceptor that could negatively affect the drinking water of our community if it experienced a collapse or a similar incident?

You have 10 seconds, sir, sorry. To the best of your ability.

*Mr. Gadis. Well, you know, from my standpoint and what I've seen, the Potomac Interceptor does go along the river. As a result, another break could cause an issue for the Washington Aqueduct because of the -- their intakes that they have along the river.

*Mr. Balderson. Thank you very much.

*Mr. Gadis. Thank you.

*Mr. Joyce. The gentleman yields. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from New York, Mr. Tonko, for his five minutes of questioning.

*Mr. Tonko. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will reiterate a point that has been made by others today: Federal funding is critical to enabling water systems to improve their infrastructure, conduct preventative maintenance, and protect public health. And if those Federal resources disappear, as is proposed by President Trump's fiscal year 2027 budget, we are likely to see more incidents like the Potomac Interceptor collapse around the country, including in communities that are less equipped to carry out a fast and effective emergency response.

Earlier we heard from the witness, Ms. Kramer, indicating that states need to expend their funds, disperse those funds from the SRF. But I think if we don't coterminously address the funding that is required of SRF, we are not completing our work.

So -- but while the Potomac Interceptor response is behind us, I would like to focus on a serious active threat to many Americans' public health, and that is lead service lines. Let me begin with you, Mr. Gadis. D.C. has one of the Nation's leading lead pipe replacement programs. Can you discuss DC Water's efforts to proactively manage its infrastructure and get these pipes out of its system?

*Mr. Gadis. Yes, sir. Thank you very much for that question.

We at DC Water, one of the decisions that we made a few years ago was that we wanted to be proactive. We did not want to wait for a consent decree to occur regarding lead service lines. As a result, we stood up Lead-Free D.C. in Washington D.C., and it has been very, very successful. There are 42,000 lead service lines in the District of Columbia to date, and we have -- we are attacking this in two phases: phase one, we will have 29,000 of these lead service lines replaced by 2030; phase two, we will have the other 13,000 replaced by 2037.

We fortunately do have the funding for 2,000 and -- for the first phase, but we are looking for funding for the second phase. So the dollars that you're talking about, they are needed by us in Washington, D.C. for us to complete phase two of the Lead-Free D.C. program.

*Mr. Tonko. And has DC Water received Federal resources to support its replacement program?

*Mr. Gadis. That -- we have, yes.

*Mr. Tonko. You have. Okay. What about the East Wing demolition and the debris being deposited? Obviously, that might include lead and some other materials. And they are going to deposit that near the river. Is there a risk to that?

*Mr. Gadis. I am not aware of that fact that you just stated. So I can research that and then get back to you in writing, if that's okay.

*Mr. Tonko. I think that would be appreciated.

[The information follows:]

**********COMMITTEE INSERT**********

*Mr. Tonko. All 50 states and D.C. received dedicated lead line replacement money through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. In Fiscal Year 2025 alone, each state received a minimum of 28.65 million. Mr. Neltner, we know that dedicated lead replacement money is expiring along with supplemental funding for the SRF. While that funding was an important initial downpayment, are there still lead lines in need of replacement across our country?

*Mr. Neltner. Yes, there are four million, an estimated four million lead service lines that need to be replaced. The goal is to get the vast majority of them out by 2037. Those funds are not enough on their own. It's going to increase rates for people to pay for that, and that's going to increase the affordability challenge for -- as water rates increase and, as we talk about, sewer if we don't get those infrastructure investments.

*Mr. Tonko. Right, so those dollars from the Feds are critical to holding down the bills that people will be paying for their own systems.

*Mr. Neltner. They are absolutely critical. That $15 billion for lead service line replacement has gone a long way to both finding the problem and making a difference, and we need states to spend the money, but we need more to make it happen.

*Mr. Tonko. Well, to the earlier point, if we don't

continue the funding for SRF for lead replacement, we are not being real about the entire situation.

I don't want to downplay the seriousness of the Potomac Interceptor collapse, but it is a symptom of a larger issue. We have aging infrastructure across our country that needs to be maintained, modernized, or replaced, and local governments and water systems simply cannot do it on their own, especially when there are big threats from lead and other dangerous contaminants like PFAS that need to be addressed. We should be working to reauthorize the SRF and other water programs at levels that will support critical infrastructure and avoid the next public health emergency.

And I look forward to the response about the debris deposit along the river and any contamination that they may cause -- that might cause.

So with that, Mr. Chair, I thank you and yield back.

*Mr. Joyce. The gentleman yields. The chair now recognizes the chairman of the full committee, Mr. Guthrie, for his five minutes of questioning.

*The Chair. Thank you, so thank you.

Mr. Gadis, I will ask you a couple of questions. One, I want to ask, has DC Water determined the cause of the collapse?

And I know there was a boulder involved, but my understanding is there was a collapse -- the boulder had been

there for decades, so it didn't cause the collapse. There was a collapse, the boulder fell into the hole, and you can assign -- I appreciate that the boulder caused more damage by that happening, but that wasn't really the cause of the collapse is my understanding. Have you all determined the actual cause of the collapse?

And if not, when do you think you will be able to determine what that is?

*Mr. Gadis. Congressman, thank you very much for the question.

We have not determined the cause of the collapse. This is aging infrastructure, and it's more than 60 years old. So we think that may be part of the cause. But without a doubt, the boulders did exacerbate this situation.

*The Chair. The damage or the cause of the actual collapse? Just the damage from the collapse, right? Or do you --

*Mr. Gadis. It would be the damage from --

*The Chair. Because it had been sitting there for a while.

And then, you know, a budget proposal that hadn't been enacted this year hasn't caused the problem over the last 60 years, so -- I don't think so.

So in 2018 you guys said we need to do repairs here, I think, right? And you applied for permits through the Park

Service. Is that when that -- you applied in 2018 for your first --

*Mr. Gadis. That is correct.

*The Chair. So I quoted earlier -- I know you were in the audience -- from the Washington Post article that states DC Water repeatedly proposed changes to repair plans, which forced new environmental assessments. So how many times did DC Water change the design and scope of its repair that kicked off a -- being necessary to have another environmental study?

*Mr. Gadis. My memory is it was two times that we did add to the plan that we had put forth.

*The Chair. So I am just trying to figure out, did any change make you have an environmental study or did the change have to be such a level of significance that it had to do that, that you had to have -- because it seems like -- it seems -- and we have talked before -- that when we talked about this, is that -- it just seems the way it was described, it just -- the permitting process is what has held you from doing the repairs that you needed to do. And I was just wondering why it took so long from 2018 until -- well, you didn't get one because it collapsed before you could repair it -- why it has taken so long to get here.

*Mr. Gadis. Thank you for the question, Congressman. I don't know why it took so long.

We still don't have a permit today. We still do not have a permit today.

*The Chair. But -- so you -- but you applied for a permit.

*Mr. Gadis. Yes.

*The Chair. And then you go back and ask for changes because you want to do something different, and it requires a new environmental assessment, correct?

*Mr. Gadis. For example, the difference may have been that we said X number of trees, and it ended up being a different number of trees. That was one of the changes.

*The Chair. You had to do an entire new environmental permit for that.

*Mr. Gadis. Yes.

*The Chair. That is what we are trying to get -- that is what I was trying to get with the superintendent. I understand he couldn't talk about a lot because of his -- litigation, I guess, that was the reason. But it was frustrating we didn't get a little further with him than that.

So when you conduct or prepare work on the Potomac Interceptor, does DC Water -- well, let me just get -- do you have to do, like, Maryland and Virginia, or is it just the National Park Service you have to get permits from?

*Mr. Gadis. Well, we have to get permits from the

National Park Service. So we do not have any permits for the for the entire segment of that pipe.

*The Chair. Okay. But -- so my question, I guess, the permits you were waiting on were Park Service only. You didn't --

*Mr. Gadis. That is correct.

*The Chair. You didn't have to deal with -- it wasn't Maryland or Virginia or any of --

*Mr. Gadis. No, sir.

*The Chair. So we will get back to -- okay. So we have got to fix the permitting process. It absolutely appears that way.

So what steps is DC Water taking in the immediate term to mitigate the damage caused by this incident, and while also working to ensure that you have 50 more -- 54 miles of pipe -- this pipe is 54 miles long, right?

*Mr. Gadis. Yes, sir.

*The Chair. So what are you doing now to mitigate, and what are you doing now to -- we need an emergency permits or some kind of action because you think this could happen again.

*Mr. Gadis. Yes, sir. Thank you very much for that question.

We are working and trying to get the permitting changed to where we can file for permits and get in to make repairs

before an incident occurs. And that is the key, is for us to --

*The Chair. That is what we want.

*Mr. Gadis. -- is for us to identify, as we've done with the additional three areas that we have identified, and we would like for that permitting process to go faster than what it goes today.

So we are working on that to make sure that we don't have to wait eight years to repair additional areas along the Potomac Interceptor.

*The Chair. Because what we want to do is set up a process that reasonable people can say, let's get this done. It took -- 2018 you started. I mean, you are not asking to take out the Sherman Sequoia tree that everybody goes to visit, and I am as a tree person as anyone, but when you are looking at, well, this tree versus that, and then end up with sewage in the Potomac River, the economic -- the environmental disaster is far bigger -- working to the collapse point. So we just have to be better and we have to figure out how we can help you and help the agencies get these permitted correctly.

I yield back.

*Mr. Joyce. The gentleman yields. The chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Allen, for his five minutes of questions.

*Mr. Allen. Thank you, Chair Joyce, for holding this important discussion on the Potomac Interceptor collapse, and I want to thank our witnesses for being here and sharing your expertise today.

So, obviously, we have an infrastructure problem. We have a pipe that is 54 miles long that has been there for 60 years, and all of a sudden we have an incident that was tragic. And so I guess my question is this, you know -- well, let me just say this.

From a permitting standpoint -- and I will say this with EPA here -- we can't get any pipelines permitted in this country. I don't care whether it is sewage, gas, you name it, we can't even get -- you know, if I wanted an exit off my interstate, it takes eight years to get a permit by the time all the environmental studies are done. And then this stuff is just deteriorating in front of our very eyes as we sit here with -- you know, we -- so "why'' is the question.

But I think the bigger thing here to deal with is, in your opinion, does this pipe need to be replaced?

*Mr. Gadis. Thank you very much for the question, Congressman.

It is -- not the whole 54 miles needs to be replaced. There are segments that we feel need to be repaired, and we've identified three of those segments that does need to be repaired. We do agree with you that the -- that we could

move a little bit -- or not we -- we hope that National Parks can move a little bit faster than what they have in the past regarding the permits. I think that's the key. But I think that we will continue to do what we've done thus far, and that is to perform proper asset management and bring to the attention of individuals that there is a replacement that is needed on different segments of the pipe.

To replace the entire 54 miles would be a --would be Herculean and it would be the funding would be out, would be very, very expensive. And so and that would rest on the backs of ratepayers. But we are we are looking at other ways that we can fund these types of projects as well.

*Mr. Allen. Okay. Are you getting outside expertise? Do you all do your engineering internally at DC Water, or are you getting outside expertise from engineering and environmental companies on how to fix this problem?

*Mr. Gadis. It is a combination of both. So we do have a full-fledged engineering part of our operation, but we are working with outside engineers, as well, some of the best that there are in the industry. And I think that was proven, that we do work with the best, and that our team is a very good team as well, as we were able to construct this bypass within a five-day period.

*Mr. Allen. Okay. So the first step is to -- well, have we got those areas that need to be replaced identified?

*Mr. Gadis. We do have them identified at this time.

*Mr. Allen. Okay, do we have a cost estimate on what it is going to take to do that?

*Mr. Gadis. Not at this point in time. We are mobilizing at this point in time on those three areas, but I'm not sure that we have a cost estimate as of yet.

*Mr. Allen. Well, we got to strike while the iron is hot here.

*Mr. Gadis. I agree.

*Mr. Allen. You know, we don't -- I mean, we have had a major tragic incident and, like I said, the way this place works, you got to make things happen and -- because there is always some reason -- this delay, that delay, you name it, it is unconscionable, really. I come from the construction world.

The other issue that we have, there was a water main that broke just a few weeks ago. And since then, water pressure is an issue in the District. And -- are you aware of that problem? I mean, we can't even take a shower, and so -- because we have inadequate water pressure. Are you aware of that problem?

*Mr. Gadis. I am not aware of that problem, sir --

*Mr. Allen. Okay, all right.

*Mr. Gadis. -- but we do -- if we could -- we will identify where that is at --

*Mr. Allen. Okay.

*Mr. Gadis. -- and we will get back to you and let you know how we're going to solve the problem, because --

*Mr. Allen. Okay.

*Mr. Gadis. -- you should -- the pressure is important to us, and we know that's important to --

*Mr. Allen. Right.

*Mr. Gadis. -- to the citizens, as well, and yourself.

*Mr. Allen. Okay. I have got just a few seconds. So what we need to do is find out how much it is going to cost, and then we got to get the permit.

*Mr. Gadis. Yes, sir.

*Mr. Allen. And then fix it.

*Mr. Gadis. Yes, sir.

*Mr. Allen. Okay. Have you any idea, like, how long it will take to fix it once we get the permit?

*Mr. Gadis. I don't myself have any idea how long, but we will be mobilizing and have that number for you -- for the cost of the pipe within the next 30 days.

*Mr. Allen. Good, thank you.

And I am out of time, so I yield back. Thank you, sir.

*Mr. Joyce. The gentleman yields.

*Mr. Gadis. Thank you.

*Mr. Joyce. The chair recognizes the gentlelady from Tennessee, Dr. Harshbarger, for her five minutes of

questioning.

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Gadis, when an assessment is complete and a section of the Potomac Interceptor is identified as requiring improvements, how does DC Water ensure those get completed?

*Mr. Gadis. I'm sorry, ma'am, can you repeat that?

*Mrs. Harshbarger. When you have identified improvements in the interceptor, how does DC Water ensure that those improvements get completed?

*Mr. Gadis. Well, one of the first things that we do is we definitely put a plan together with our engineering and also, if we need to bring in any partners to help us construct whatever may be needed in order to make sure that we're able to satisfy not only meet the requirement from a cost standpoint, because that's very, very important, since we have ratepayers.

And so, as a result of that, we then start the construction. We always try and come in on time and under budget whenever we're constructing something.

*Mrs. Harshbarger. How long does it take, on average, for DC Water to get the required approval and a contractor to begin work once an issue has been identified?

*Mr. Gadis. It does not take us long from that standpoint, because we have master service agreements with a

number of contractors, and so they are very aware, and so it cuts down on our procurement process where we've already qualified --

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Right.

*Mr. Gadis. -- those contractors, and we can put those contractors to work the -- that same day.

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Good. How many contractors are currently working on improvements on the Potomac Interceptor, do you know?

*Mr. Gadis. I don't know the exact number, but there are a number of partners that we have out working on the Potomac Interceptor.

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Well, at least you have a process to figure out who those contractors are going to be.

Are you satisfied with the current progress of the remediation efforts following the collapse?

*Mr. Gadis. Thank you very much for that question.

We are satisfied with the progress that we've been able to make. We are staying in close contact with the community, as well, and making sure that the smell and those sort of things are being eliminated. We're also continuing to test the water in the river --

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Yes.

*Mr. Gadis. -- which is very, very important.

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Yes, it is.

*Mr. Gadis. And so in doing that we've seen the river really come back and rebound very, very well, where the numbers are back to normal within the water columns in the river today.

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Is there anything that could have been done differently to expedite the emergency repair or cleanup process, or streamline any of those operations?

*Mr. Gadis. As we -- and we will do a full-fledged investigation on our -- on the way that we performed.

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Yes.

*Mr. Gadis. And we do that all the time when we take a look at projects that we execute. We have not done that as of yet, so we will do that.

What I will say is that we had expected to have the bypass built after the -- from the 19th, we expected it to take approximately 7 days, 7 to 8 days. And for us to get that --

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Yes.

*Mr. Gadis. -- done in four to five days was a great effort that was -- by our contractors and by the men and women at DC Water.

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Yeah. Well, what is DC Water doing to monitor the remaining portions of the Potomac Interceptor that are known to high-risk -- to be high-risk areas, basically?

*Mr. Gadis. So what we are doing is we are -- we have taken a look at the entire 54 miles of pipe. And with the 54 miles of pipe, we've CCTV that we've used --

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Yes.

*Mr. Gadis. -- LiDAR, from that standpoint. We're also using drones. We're walking the -- walking that --

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Do you do this on a regular basis? I guess, you know, I am thinking of what, you know, utilities in my district do preemptively, like TVA or some of these guys, or, you know, with pipelines. Do you do that on a regular basis before something happens so you can find those issues?

*Mr. Gadis. We do, and that is something that we do on a regular basis, especially when we identify a area that may be prone to whatever it may be, that we're seeing something, we always make sure we keep an eye on it and we go back, make sure that the degradation of pipe or whatever it might be is not advancing.

And so there are -- this pipe is built in a way in which there are dips up and down and those sort of things. And so gases and those sort of things are causing some of the deterioration.

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Yes.

*Mr. Gadis. So we're keeping an eye on all of those areas, as well. But the three areas that we have identified,

we will definitely be keeping an eye on that. But as I stated earlier, we will be mobilizing and executing repairs within the next 30 days.

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Well, it is good to always do that after-action report so we will know what to prepare for next time.

*Mr. Gadis. Yes, ma'am.

*Mrs. Harshbarger. Thank you sir.

And with that I yield back.

*Mr. Joyce. The gentlelady yields. Votes have been called on the floor, so we will now recess for the floor votes and resume 10 minutes after the last vote is called. The committee will now stand in recess.

[Recess.]

*Mr. Joyce. The committee will come to order. We will now resume our hearing on the corrosion, collapse, and cleanup, examining the Potomac Interceptor collapse. We now recognize Mr. Weber of Texas for his five minutes of questioning.

*Mr. Weber. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you all both for being here.

Mr. Gadis, I am going to come to you first, please. The Potomac Interceptor collapse was a significant environmental disaster. I know I am telling Noah about the flood, right? The point being that it is estimated that 240 million gallons

of raw sewage flowed -- spilled into the Potomac River. In your testimony you highlighted that DC Water became aware of that break the afternoon of January the 19th of 2026. Do you remember that?

Okay. Be sure you use your --

*Mr. Gadis. Sorry --

*Mr. Weber. -- mike there.

*Mr. Gadis. Yes, sir.

*Mr. Weber. All good, all good. However, D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser did not declare an emergency until February the 18th of 2026, essentially a month later. Do you remember that?

*Mr. Gadis. Yes, sir.

*Mr. Weber. Okay. According to -- did you have interaction with her in that regard, with the mayor? Any interaction with the mayor when that happened?

*Mr. Gadis. If I can -- my memory -- and thank you for the question. From my memory, there was interaction not directly with the mayor, but with -- interaction with her team. But not necessarily regarding that issue or --

*Mr. Weber. Okay. So according to your estimation, how many gallons during that timeframe of raw sewage flowed into the Potomac River before the emergency was declared? How many gallons?

*Mr. Gadis. Before the emergency was --

*Mr. Weber. How many gallons of raw sewage flowed into the Potomac River before they declared an emergency?

*Mr. Gadis. Approximately 243 million gallons.

*Mr. Weber. Two hundred and forty-three million gallons in one month?

*Mr. Gadis. Well, that was over -- that was in -- that was from the 19th until we were able to put the bypass in place. That's -- those are the numbers that I know --

*Mr. Weber. About how many days was that, would you reckon?

*Mr. Gadis. That was about five days.

*Mr. Weber. Five days, okay.

*Mr. Gadis. Yes.

*Mr. Weber. Considering DC Water's knowledge of the poor state of the interceptor, what was your specific role in advertising [sic] the District of Columbia Government on declaring that same emergency? What was your role in that?

*Mr. Gadis. I did not have a role in that, sir.

*Mr. Weber. Not at all?

*Mr. Gadis. Not that I can remember, sir.

*Mr. Weber. Okay. Did any of your staff have a role in it?

*Mr. Gadis. They may have, but not that I can remember.

*Mr. Weber. Not that you can remember?

*Mr. Gadis. Yes.

*Mr. Weber. Okay. And I am going to come -- stay with you, Mr. Gadis, for a minute. My district home in Texas is home to a significant portion of our Nation's energy production infrastructure. Have you been to Texas?

*Mr. Gadis. Thank you for the question. I actually -- not only have I been to Texas, I attended Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas.

*Mr. Weber. Okay. Well, then, where did you get your education? No, I'm just teasing you.

[Laughter.]

*Mr. Weber. I'm just teasing you.

My district produces consumer gasoline, natural gas, military grade fuel, as well as jet fuel in large quantities, the most in the country in some instances. As a result of these highly technical -- and dangerous processes, I will add -- I am deeply aware of the steps required to prevent such an environmental disaster that has just happened. One major -- or we are talking about just happened.

One major preventative measure is addressing aging infrastructure. We keep a close watch on that. Considering the Potomac Interceptor's age and criticality to the surrounding area, what measures, in your judgment, were taken to prevent that interceptor's collapse?

*Mr. Gadis. Thank you very much for the question, Congressman.

You know, we have -- DC Water, we've supplied more than 40,000 documents to the committee. So I'm sure that --

*Mr. Weber. Forty thousand documents?

*Mr. Gadis. Yes, sir, to the committee. So I'm sure that a lot of that is in there that you're asking a question about.

But there are a number of things that we have done at DC Water from 2018 up until the day of the collapse.

*Mr. Weber. But you don't have in mind any of the preventive maintenance issues that come to your mind today?

*Mr. Gadis. Well, we did what we call -- well, asset management is one of the things that we do, and we've documented that, and we've taken a look at -- from a LiDAR standpoint, also CCTV, drones, also walking the 54 miles, and especially that segment of the pipe that we knew there were issues. The -- and we did not see the rocks or, actually, boulders that were above it because that's outside of the pipe. But we extensively looked inside of the pipe, and that's why we were able to put it on our CIP list and also alert National Parks that this is an area that we wanted to do the repairs on.

*Mr. Weber. Okay. During that timeframe -- I am running out of -- this for you to give me an answer later: Were contractors or Federal agencies aware that delays in permitting approvals could result in that collapse?

And if you don't mind, respond to my office in writing about that. I'll repeat it real quick: Were contractors or Federal agencies aware that delays in permitting approvals could result in the collapse of this infrastructure?

[The information follows:]

**********COMMITTEE INSERT**********

*Mr. Weber. Mr. Chairman, thank you, I yield back.

*Mr. Joyce. Seeing that there are no further members wishing -- ah, perfect timing.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Alabama, Mr. Palmer, for his five minutes of questioning.

*Mr. Palmer. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Sorry for the delay. I know time is precious for everybody.

Mr. Gadis, is it true that DC Water hired an external engineering party to investigate the collapse?

*Mr. Gadis. I'm sorry, could you repeat that? I didn't hear you.

*Mr. Palmer. Is it true that DC Water hired an external engineering party to investigate the collapse? Did you hire an external -- can you understand what I am asking?

*Mr. Gadis. Yeah, I think that I understand what you're asking. I was going to -- I was trying to let you finish, I'm sorry.

We have been working with external contractors and our contractors --

*Mr. Palmer. So the answer is yes. So what I would like to know is -- there is some things in the timeline that I wonder about. So you had an external engineer do the inspections of the line. Is that correct? Who did the inspections of the lines to determine that -- the possibility of a breach?

*Mr. Gadis. That would have been DC Water engineers and also external contractors, as well, have --

*Mr. Palmer. Okay.

*Mr. Gadis. -- taken a look at the lines.

*Mr. Palmer. And then his recommendation came back, resulted in the DC Water Board approving an emergency contract. Is that correct?

*Mr. Gadis. I don't -- I'm not aware of which date you're talking about --

*Mr. Palmer. Well, that would have --

*Mr. Gadis. -- or which board meeting that you're speaking to.

*Mr. Palmer. Your --

*Mr. Gadis. I know that --

*Mr. Palmer. Mr. Gadis, you are well aware of this. I mean, you know this. Just answer.

I mean, for crying out loud, I have it right here. And it was to address failures of the Potomac Interceptor high-priority repair and rehabilitation of a section of the Potomac Interceptor to address sections that warrant repair in advance of longer-term capital projects.

So when you issue an emergency contract, that by definition means you don't go through the regular request for proposal. You know that there's a problem that needs immediate attention that -- isn't that why the board approved

an emergency contract? You would have later gone out with an RFP for longer-term capital projects.

*Mr. Gadis. Congressman, the -- yeah, I assume the emergency contract that you are referencing was a MSA. And so it was not necessarily for that segment of the pipe, either. It was to become part of a master service agreement, as well --

*Mr. Palmer. I have got it right here, and it says it is for the Potomac Interceptor. It might not have been that specific site, but your engineer knew that the line was degraded. And as a matter of fact, they knew that there were multiple places along the line where a collapse could have occurred. That is what -- that is the reason why you had to issue an emergency contract.

What I don't understand is, after the board met and voted for the emergency contract based on the recommendations of your engineer, you didn't execute the contract.

*Mr. Gadis. Congressman, first of all, our board does not approve contracts. Our board gives us the right to negotiate contracts, and so we negotiate contracts. But our board does not approve contracts.

*Mr. Palmer. It was a subcommittee of your board, or was it the board? Who -- I have the minutes of the meeting. You did it virtually, the meeting. And it was approved, almost a $45 million contract, and --

*Mr. Gadis. It was approved for us to negotiate a contract, not approved by the board for that contract to actually be instituted. So there was negotiations that had to occur --

*Mr. Palmer. It says contract.

*Mr. Gadis. -- regarding that contract.

*Mr. Palmer. It does not say to negotiate a contract, it says contract.

Listen, I am not trying to go after anybody. I am trying to make sure this doesn't happen again. In the first panel -- that was the whole point of my line of questioning in the first panel, was to make sure this doesn't happen again. And so trying to avoid any culpability and -- or any appearance of incompetence is not what this is about. It is about making sure this doesn't happen again.

I mean, this is an ecological environmental disaster because you didn't execute the contract in a timely manner to have someone on site with the ability to mitigate a collapse or a breach. And, you know, that really bothers me.

I just -- what I am trying to find out is why the contract wasn't executed and why this was allowed to happen. And there is failures across the board. This -- the Park Service, the Corps of Engineers should have all been notified when the inspections showed certain sections of the line were in imminent possibility of breach or collapse. They should

have been informed. This should have been a total team effort.

The one thing that you did right, in my opinion, was you -- your engineer gave a report to the board, or members of the board, and they approved an emergency contract. The one thing that you really failed on was to execute the contract.

And I am not done with this. I am going to continue to look into this because I think this is not a red or blue issue, this is not liberal or conservative. It is none of that. It is about taking care of people. And there was a huge failure to take care of people.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your -- for allowing me to get back. I yield back.

*Mr. Joyce. The gentleman yields. Seeing that there are no further members wishing to ask questions, I would like to thank our witnesses again for being here today.

I ask unanimous consent to insert into the record the documents included on the staff hearing documents list.

Without objection, so ordered.

[The information follows:]

**********COMMITTEE INSERT**********

*Mr. Joyce. Pursuant to committee rules, I remind members that they have 10 business days to submit additional questions for the record, and I ask the witnesses to submit their responses within 10 business days upon receipt of the questions. Members should submit their questions by the close of business on Thursday, June 4.

Without objection, the subcommittee is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:49 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]