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1

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TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR RURAL WATER

SYSTEMS: S. 611, THE GRASSROOTS RURAL AND

SMALL COMMUNITY WATER SYSTEMS ASSISTANCE ACT

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2015

House of Representatives,

Subcommittee on Environment and Economy,

Committee on Energy and Commerce,

Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:00 a.m., in Room 2123 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. John Shimkus [chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Members present: Representatives Shimkus, Harper, Latta, McKinley, Johnson, Flores, Cramer, Tonko, Schrader, Green, McNerney, and Pallone (ex officio).

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2

Staff present: Will Batson, Legislative Clerk; Rebecca Card, Assistant Press Secretary; Jerry Couri, Senior Environmental Policy Advisor; David McCarthy, Chief Counsel, Environment and Economy; Chris Sarley, Policy Coordinator, Environment and Economy; Dan Schneider, Press Secretary; Christine Brennan, Press Secretary; Jacqueline Cohen, Senior Counsel; Rick Kessler, Senior Advisor and Staff Director, Energy and Environment; Alexander Ratner, Policy Analyst; and Timia Crisp, AAAS Fellow.

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3

Mr. Shimkus. The committee will come to order and the chair recognizes himself for an opening statement.

Today, we are reviewing Senate Bill 611, the Grassroots Rural and Small Community Water Systems Assistance Act. This bill, which passed the Senate by unanimous consent on June 9th of this year is the Senate companion to H.R. 2853, introduced by our ranking member of the subcommittee, Mr. Tonko, and the vice chairman of the subcommittee, Mr. Harper.

I congratulate and thank them for their bipartisan work to raise the profile of this issue before the subcommittee and encouraging our work on it.

According to the Census Bureau, approximately 27 percent of the U.S. population lives in rural areas. The smallest water systems account for 77 percent of all systems.

As someone who proudly represents communities in small town and rural America, I am glad we have bipartisan interest in tackling this subject.

Under the Safe Drinking Water Act, small and rural drinking water supply systems are subject to a number of drinking water regulations issued by EPA. These requirements include system monitoring, treatment to remove certain contaminants and reporting.

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4

Addressing these matters requires technical, managerial, and physical capabilities that are difficult to develop and are often beyond the capacity of these towns to afford on the same scale as urban centers, particularly when it comes to regulatory compliance.

It is ironic that these communities, where residents work hard to support their families and their local governments while often earning wages below those of their counterparts in the more urbanized areas, face per customer compliance costs and demands that are disproportionate to many larger communities.

Sometimes, it is just a matter of having the ability to keep up with the red tape. Rather than throwing more scarce money at the problem, we learned in February that these communities need help to smartly assess what their needs are for these systems and prioritize the importance of those needs.

The bill before us amends Safe Drinking Water Act to reauthorize the EPA's program providing technical assistance to small public water systems.

Senate Bill 611 maintains the existing statutory authority of \$15 million annually, including 3 percent for technical assistance to public water systems owned or operated by Indian tribes, but changes the law to cover funding from fiscal year 2015

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5

through fiscal year 2020.

The bill also authorizes EPA to provide technical assistance programs to small public water systems through grants or cooperative agreements made to nonprofit organizations.

The bill requires preference in awarding grants to nonprofits that are most qualified and experienced and that small water systems find most beneficial and effective -- a feature we heard about during our February hearing.

Finally, while Senate Bill 611 prevents grants and cooperative agreements from being used to bring a citizen suit under the Safe Drinking Water Act, it expands the types of activities eligible to receive a grant or cooperative agreement under this Safe Drinking Water Act to include assistance with source water protection plans, monitoring plans and water security.

I want to thank our witnesses who joined us. Having this hearing today is all the more important because, while the House Appropriations Committee has not provided small water technical assistance funding for fiscal year 2016, that committee has left open the option that it would reevaluate funding for this matter as part of a later annual spending bill if Congress enacts a fresh authorization.

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6

People who live in rural communities deserve every bit of water quality and technical resources that folks who live in densely populated urban centers do.

We look forward to your wisdom in helping us understand these issues. Thanks again to Mr. Tonko and Mr. Harper for their work on this issue.

I yield the balance of my time and I now yield to Mr. Tonko for the purpose of making an opening statement.

Mr. Tonko. Thank you, Chair Shimkus, and good morning. For holding this hearing, we thank you. It is important to review the Grassroots, Rural and Small Community Water Systems Assistance Act.

I am very pleased to be working with you, Chair, and with Representative Harper and the other members of the subcommittee to move this bill forward.

Sen. Wicker's bill and its companion, H.R. 2853, offers a small but important step that we need to take to support small water utilities. S. 611 reauthorizes a small but important program that delivers technical assistance and training to community water systems.

The ratepayer base for these small systems does not provide a sufficient operating budget to support full time technical

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7

positions.

Technical assistance programs like circuit riders and source water protection programs help small utility operators to keep clean safe drinking water flowing to their customers.

Our community water utilities have needs that go far beyond technical assistance, of course. The hearing in our subcommittee back in February provided us with ample evidence of the many needs of small community water utilities.

The situation that exists in rural, suburban and metropolitan areas across our country with respect to the condition of our drinking water infrastructure is indeed very serious.

Drinking water infrastructure across the country is in need of major repairs and major upgrades. Communities are struggling to find the resources needed to maintain water mains, pumping stations and drinking water treatment facilities.

Households and businesses across our country expect reliable daily delivery of safe clean water at an affordable price to their homes and their businesses.

They not only expect it, it is essential to the social and economic viability of every community, of every household, of every business.

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8

The inconvenience, the disruption of daily activities and economic losses to businesses of emergency shutdowns to drinking water systems is indeed significant, even for a shutdown of short duration.

A longer term break in service, as we all know, is devastating. Water utilities, especially those with small rate basis, cannot simply pass all of their costs for technical assistance, infrastructure repairs, tapping into new water sources or keeping pace with drinking water regulations on to their customers by raising rates.

The backlog of maintenance is now too large to be covered by rate increases alone. It is long past time for Congress to step in and provide robust financial support, support that would repair and modernize this essential infrastructure.

Too often now utilities are responding to emergency situations, situations created by ruptures of water mains or sudden problems with raw water quality or quantity. Emergency response costs far more than a systematic planned program of repair and replacement.

The Environmental Protection Agency's most recent report on drinking water infrastructure and their needs indicates that -- an investment of \$384.2 billion over the next 20 years, about \$19

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9

billion, that is, per year.

Because past Congresses failed to heed the information that we asked the agency to produce this number has grown by about \$157 billion since the first report was issued back in 1995.

We are headed in the wrong direction. Clearly, more resources are needed. We are not saving money by continuing to ignore this problem. We are only passing an ever growing maintenance bill onto our children and grandchildren and generations yet unborn.

Our parents and grandparents invested in the infrastructure that enabled our nation to grow and our nation to prosper. We have a responsibility to ensure that the nation's infrastructure remains a strong foundation for prosperity into the future.

In addition, to support through traditional funding mechanisms the state revolving loan fund and grant programs, we should also examine alternative financing mechanisms, new technologies and potential new partnerships that would enable every dollar to go that much further in reducing the backlog of infrastructure projects.

We cannot afford to delay these investments any longer. The bill for these repairs is growing, growing larger over time and failure to maintain these systems jeopardizes public health and

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10

limits development and economic growth.

Public health, community viability and economic vitality all rest on the foundation of sound infrastructure.

We cannot maintain global leadership and compete in a 21st century global economy with poorly maintained 20th century infrastructure.

And so, Mr. Chair, I hope this bill will not be the subcommittee's last effort on drinking water this Congress. I am certain that other members hear about this problem in their districts as often as you and I do.

If we work together we can rebuild this essential infrastructure and foster economic growth and protect public health. We have an excellent panel with us today and I thank you both for taking time away from the important work that you do to be here with us this morning.

With that, I look forward to your testimony and to working with you going forward. Let us build our drinking water infrastructure.

With that, I yield back to the chair.

Mr. Shimkus. Gentleman yields back his time.

The chair now recognizes the vice chair of the committee and the coauthor along with the ranking member of the House version

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11

of this legislation, Mr. Harper, for 5 minutes.

Mr. Harper. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you so much for our witnesses being here.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this legislative hearing on S. 611, the Grass Roots Rural and Small Community Water System Assistance Act.

As you well know, this issue is of great importance to our constituents who live in rural and small communities. Rural water system often find themselves at a loss when complying with federal rules and regulations and the technical assistance provided by S. 611 is the tool they use to ensure they are meeting the needs of their customers.

I appreciate the work Mr. Tonko and his staff have done on this issue and for his help in introducing H.R. 2853, the House companion bill to S. 611.

I also would like to welcome my friend, Kirby Mayfield, the executive director of the Mississippi Rural Water Association, and I look forward to hearing today from each of these witnesses and working on these rural water issues in the future.

With that, I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Shimkus. Gentleman yields back his time.

Chair now recognizes the ranking member of the full

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12

committee, Mr. Pallone, for 5 minutes.

Mr. Pallone. Thank you.

I am pleased that the subcommittee is returning to the important issue of drinking water safety. We started this Congress by examining some emerging drinking water threats including toxic blue green algae and the legislation this subcommittee passed on harmful algal blooms is now taking effect and it has set us on a path to address that serious threat.

We also held a hearing back in February on problems facing rural water systems. As we heard then, these systems are facing serious threats from outdated infrastructure, lack of funding and extreme weather.

We in Congress have continued to underfund infrastructure improvements and have continued to undermine efforts to address climate change. So we should expect these problems to get worse before they get better.

Resources are central to any conversation about safe drinking water. Much of our nation's drinking water infrastructure is well beyond its useful life and in desperate need of replacement. Investing in drinking water infrastructure protects public health, creates jobs and boosts the economy.

It is imperative that this subcommittee take on the important

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13

task of reauthorizing the drinking water state revolving fund. The longer we put off drinking water repairs, the more pressing the public health threats become.

But the subcommittee is not tackling that important task today. Instead, the majority is focused on a small pot of money set aside for technical assistance for small public water systems.

This money, distributed through grantees including the National Rural Water Association and the Rural Community Assistance Partnership, has been important for small systems though it does not begin to close the infrastructure funding gap that they face.

Both NRWA and RCAP will be represented on the panel today and I look forward to hearing from them about how this program can be implemented to the greatest benefit for small systems and public health.

I expect the committee and probably the House will move this legislation. It will be signed by the president. That is a good step and I welcome it. But it is not the whole solution for small systems or for our drinking water infrastructure.

Small systems serve only 8 percent of the population. We should absolutely do what is necessary to ensure they have safe water.

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14

But we should also protect the other 92 percent and that means reauthorizing the SRF, ensuring that fracking is done safely, ensuring source water protection, addressing drought and planning for climate change.

I liked the algae bill we worked on earlier this year. This bill shows that we can come together to pass laws and address drinking water issues.

So I hope my Republican colleagues will see this only as the beginning and I thank the chairman for calling this hearing.

I particularly thank the ranking member of our subcommittee, Mr. Tonko, for his leadership on drinking water issues.

I don't know if anybody else wants my time. If not, I will yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Shimkus. The gentleman yields back his time.

So, again, welcome. Your full statement is submitted for the record. You will have five minutes. We are not going to be, you know, harsh on the time but we appreciate you coming in and making the effort to be here.

So, first of all, I would like to recognize Mr. Kirby Mayfield, executive director of the Mississippi Rural Water Association. You are recognized for 5 minutes.

Welcome.

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15

STATEMENTS OF KIRBY MAYFIELD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MISSISSIPPI RURAL WATER ASSOCIATION; ROBERT B. STEWART, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, RURAL COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE PARTNERSHIP, INC.

STATEMENT OF MR. MAYFIELD

Mr. Mayfield. Thank you, and good morning, Chairman Shimkus, Ranking Member Tonko, members of the subcommittee.

I am Kirby Mayfield, the executive director of Mississippi Rural Water Association, a nonprofit association of over 1,000 small rural communities as members.

All small and rural communities have the very important public responsibility of complying with all federal water regulations and for supplying the public with safe drinking water and sanitation every second of every day.

Small and rural communities often have difficulty providing safe affordable drinking water and sanitation due to limited economies of scale and lack of technical experience.

I am very proud that our congressman on the committee, Representative Greg Harper, is sponsor of the Grassroots Rural and Small Community Water Systems Assistance Act in the House of Representatives. Thank you very much, Congressman Harper.

Attached to my written testimony is a letter from the New

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16

York Rural Water Association to Representative Tonko, stating, "On behalf of all the rural small communities in the 20th congressional district in the state of New York, we are grateful to Congressman Tonko for being the original cosponsor of the Grassroots Rural Water Small Community Water Systems Assistance Act and for your continued assistance."

Mr. Chairman, I used to be a rural water circuit rider for over a decade back in Mississippi. As a circuit rider, as a water operations and compliance assistance technician who travels the state to be available on site and immediately to any small community that has water issues, the circuit rider concept was designed and funded by Congress to allow small communities access to technical expertise that is available to most all larger communities.

A typical on-site contact could include ensuring the water service is protected and secure, discovering and repairing a faulty chlorination system, assisting the community to remove and replace the filtration media, training a new operator to run that particular treatment system, finding engineering and construction errors in a new sewer system, solving lead and copper rule problems or completing all the paperwork for funding programs including the state revolving funds.

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17

Often this means being available to travel to the communities on nights, weekends and during disasters when the problem occurs. Each community's water infrastructure is unique, which means technical assistance must be available to address that community's particular problem.

Regarding the Grassroots Rural and Small Community Water Systems Assistance Act, small and rural communities urge the subcommittee to approve the bill for the following reasons.

The EPA appropriation bill directs about one-half of 1 percent of the agency's internal budget to drinking water technical assistance.

Of the billions of dollars provided to EPA by Congress each year, small rural communities will tell you they see and feel the most benefit from the dollars provided to on-site technical assistance.

The bill reauthorizes the Safe Drinking Water Act technical assistance provision and mandates that EPA target congressional funding for the most beneficial assistance to small rural communities.

The preference provision in the bill ensures EPA will follow congressional intent and administration of the appropriations.

This provision would have implementing the program easier

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for EPA by providing greater clarity of the intent of Congress to require EPA to ask each technical assistance provider competing for the funding to simply demonstrate to what extent community water systems find their proposal to be the most beneficial and effective.

Small and rural communities are very hopeful the bill can be enacted in the remaining weeks of this congressional session and be operative in this appropriations cycle.

Currently, the small rural communities are struggling under new federal regulations, complex funding program applications and continuing mandatory operator training requirements.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before the subcommittee and discuss this very important public health issue for small and rural communities.

I would be happy to entertain any questions from the subcommittee. Thank you.

[The statement of Mr. Mayfield follows:]

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19

Mr. Shimkus. Thank you, Mr. Mayfield.

And now I will turn to Robert Stewart, executive director of Rural Community Assistance Partnership Incorporated, and I think you were here a couple months ago. It is great to have you back, and welcome.

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STATEMENT OF MR. STEWART

Mr. Stewart. Thank you so much, Chairman.

I really appreciate the opportunity to come back and, Chairman Shimkus and Ranking Member Tonko and members of the committee, it really is a pleasure to be here and talk to you about this subject.

I think what we have heard already has laid a great foundation sort of describing what the problem is. But, you know, I am here to testify in support of any efforts including this legislation that can increase the availability of technical assistance and training for small community water systems that is provided by those nonprofit organizations best suited to provide this assistance that have staff on the ground in every state and that is directed at meeting the most critical needs of small communities in regards to regulatory compliance, financial, managerial and technical sustainability.

My name, again, is Robert Stewart. I am with the Rural Community Assistance Partnership, which is a national organization, been around 40 years working with a couple thousand rural communities every year primarily on water and wastewater issues as well as solid waste, affordable housing and economic

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21

development issues.

Section 1442(e) of the Safe Drinking Water Act amendments of 1996 were meant to help small communities comply with the increasing regulatory burden that was being placed on them by the Safe Drinking Water Act, sort of a trade-off where we are going to ask you to comply with additional requirements and these have been coming down significantly in the last 20 years.

In order to comply with these things, we said it was going to be a Congress -- you all said it was going to be necessarily to provide some technical assistance and that is what 1442(e) has -- was meant to do and has been -- we have been working on.

And, you know, since the expiration of the initial authorization Congress had continued to fund this program, which we are very -- we are very much appreciative of, the thousands of small communities that rely on this technical assistance are appreciative of.

You know, I might point out that it has been sort of somewhat distressing to us the EPA has never included this funding within their own budget and it has fallen on the National Rural Water Association and my organization to come to Congress to sort of have these funds appropriated every year.

At the same time, EPA, and Mr. Mayfield was sort of alluding

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to this in a way but I will say it more directly, EPA has spent a lot of money on developing a variety of tools and programs that are meant to help small communities but which I think in large part have been of marginal usefulness to these small communities.

You know, so one thing I want to talk about, which is -- I don't think it is probably under discussion here at all but why -- you know, what is the need for on the ground kind of assistance that RCAP and National Rural Water Association provides.

You know, we have heard about the lack of staffing. Typically, you have volunteer staff in these small communities, people that might be working part time.

Many times there is a lack of expertise in meeting the kind of regulatory requirements that these systems fall under in regard to the operations and the compliance.

There is a real difficulty in accessing existing financing sources.

Whether that is due to the EPA's state revolving funds or the rural development's water environment program, it is just -- it requires a lot of sophistication in order to understand that they are there, access those fundings, meet all the requirements and then carry through a construction project.

There is also just a variety of issues just in managing a

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23

small water utility. This is just like any other business you might come across except it exists in a heavily regulated environment.

And you combine providing a public service, heavily regulated environment, lack of resources, it is just very difficult for small systems -- small community systems -- to sort of meet all these requirements without some additional kind of training and technical assistance such as the legislation that we are considering here provides.

The needs are many, as I said before, and I understand the resources are few, and I think any time we have a chance to direct the resources to where it is needed the most you are going to see NRW and RCAP being in support of that and I think that is what this does.

There is a lot of opportunities that we have heard mentioned. I know Mr. Tonko mentioned a couple of these things. You know, regionalisation in small communities is something we really need to see.

We need to sort of be in a mode of sharing resources and working together. As you all know there is 5,600 thousand community water systems in this country. It is just how many electric utilities are there.

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24

You know, I mean, hardly any compared to the tens of thousands of small water systems there are. But the needs, again, you know, emergency preparedness -- we have heard about these -- a drought, training and equipping operators in small systems, a budget and rate setting, you know, accessing informational resources.

You know, there is just this whole litany of needs that small communities have a real difficult time meeting whereas when you look at the larger utilities they will have professional engineers on staff, CPAs on staff, planners on staff.

And in a small utility like Mr. Mayfield was referring to specifically, it is usually one person that has, you know, 10 different jobs.

And so it has been really tough and so I just welcome the opportunity to talk more about this. I am going to end it here because hopefully you all have some questions that I can answer and I am sure Mr. Mayfield and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Thank you.

[The statement of Mr. Stewart follows:]

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25

Mr. Shimkus. Thank you, Mr. Stewart.

Before we get to questions for our witnesses, I would ask unanimous consent that all members of the subcommittee have 5 legislative days to submit an opening statement on this hearing into the record.

Also a written statement from the U.S. EPA on the subject of today's hearing will be included in the record and a written statement from the American Water Works Association on the subject of this hearing be included in the record if it is submitted to the committee by the end of the week.

Without objection, so ordered.

And will recognize myself 5 minutes to start the questioning and this is for both of you and then we will go to Mr. Mayfield and Mr. Stewart.

What is the role of technical assistance through the Safe Drinking Water Act in helping you comply with the law and avoid adverse public health impacts?

Mr. Mayfield. Our technical assistance through our circuit rider program we go out and help these systems. It don't matter if it is technical, managerial or financial. We respond to these systems and these water systems -- these operators look up to us to keep them updated on what the new federal rules and regulations

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26

are.

So we are constantly doing training and even on-site training when we go and we are training them on what the new regulations are and how to meet them.

Mr. Shimkus. Mr. Stewart.

Mr. Stewart. Yes, I totally agree. I think the small water systems, when they are faced with the new rules like there is a revised Total Coliform Rule, which is like unbelievably long and hard to digest, you know, if you have someone that it out there on site than can explain that to them probably in 10 or 15 minutes as opposed to spending hours trying to wade through a regulation or call somebody to try to get that information.

So I think the technical assistance under the Safe Drinking Water Act is meant for compliance purposes. So that is the bottom line.

One thing, I think, and this was just mentioned that I think we need to keep in mind is that compliance is not just a function of being able to operate the system.

It is a function of also being able to finance and manage that utility and sometimes I have had the impression that that has not been EPA's priority.

EPA's priority as far as where they are putting the money

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that you have appropriated has been strictly on the operations and compliance end and somewhat neglecting the foundation of all utilities, all businesses and that is to have sustainable management financing in place.

Mr. Shimkus. Great. Thank you.

How is the -- how is the uncertainty, which we are living in right now, over funding or use of technical assistance provided under the Safe Drinking Water Act Section 1442(e) affected your organization?

Mr. Mayfield.

Mr. Mayfield. With Mississippi Rural Water, it has affected us with a reduction of staff. We have had to lay off two of our staff members that was funded under this program.

We are trying to keep our services up but sometimes it is difficult.

Mr. Shimkus. Mr. Stewart, do you want to add to that?

Mr. Stewart. You are referring to my organization or theB

Mr. Shimkus. Well, no. Just to the organizations like Mr. Mayfield. What is the observation of the effect on them?

Mr. Stewart. Yes. I think what happens is that if they don't have this kind of assistance they are going to fall out of compliance.

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They are not going to be able to pay their bills. They are not managing their utility correctly and what does that cause? That causes more problems for the state regulators.

And so, I mean, a small investment in technical assistance and outreach that we are talking about here prevents a large amount of money being spent by the states to enforce the rules, you know, send out administrative orders, you know, follow up on that.

I mean, it is a whole lot better to spend a little money to sort of keep a system from going out of compliance than it is to get them back into compliance.

Mr. Shimkus. Thank you.

And my last question for you, Mr. Stewart, do you hope that Senate Bill 611 will streamline the way EPA currently implements Section 1442(e) of the Safe Drinking Water Act?

Mr. Stewart. My honest answer would be no, and that is just because on reflection of how they used -- how they have used the money in the past that has been appropriated for this purpose.

They have taken a long time to get this money out to the successful people that are competing, which has typically been rural water and RCAP.

They have taken typically a year and a half from the time the appropriations is until the money actually flows to our

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29

organizations when we have been successful in competing for this funding.

And they have also -- and I don't want to repeat what I already said but there is also this emphasis on the money just to go strictly to a compliance operational approach and not what we really need.

They are all the same. It is like a three-legged stool, right? I mean, if you don't have the operations, you don't have the finance, you don't have the management all together supporting the utility then it is going to fall.

Mr. Shimkus. So I think you are saying you would like for this to help streamline the process?

Mr. Stewart. Yes.

Mr. Shimkus. Okay.

Mr. Stewart. And, excuse me, sir. I think it will. I think it will provide some help and some additional direction and that is, you know -- because it is sort of -- you know, this could be used by nonprofit organizations for certain purposes and for activities that are supported and needed by the small communities.

Mr. Shimkus. Great. Thank you very much.

I yield back my time and now recognize the ranking member of the subcommittee, Mr. Tonko, for 5 minutes.

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Mr. Tonko. Thank you again, Chair Shimkus, for calling this hearing and I also want to, again, thank my colleague, Mr. Harper, for the work that he has done on this important issue.

Drinking water systems in every congressional district are facing significant challenges as they work to ensure everyone, even people in small communities, have access to safe drinking water.

It seems that every week we read about water supply problems, water main breaks or other events that disrupt our drinking water supplies and services.

Mr. Stewart, much of our drinking water infrastructure is decades old and in need of repair or replacement. That is as true for small communities as for large ones.

Your testimony emphasizes the need for technical assistance in applying for funds as well as for dealing with finance and management issues.

When small systems need infrastructure repairs or replacement, is it just a matter of not knowing how to access funds or is there also a need to make additional funding resources available?

Mr. Stewart. I think it is both because if you can't access the existing funding then that funding is going to go to the larger

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31

communities. The small communities just have a hard time accessing that funding just because of the requirements associated with those.

But I don't think there is any doubt. I mean, you quoted EPA studies. There has been AWWA studies. There has been the engineering organizations have done studies and it is an unfunded need.

We definitely need in this country more money to be invested in water utilities urban and rural.

Mr. Tonko. Thank you, and how would a small system obtain immediate funding needed for emergency repairs when they experience a major problem with their infrastructure or with their source water?

Mr. Stewart. Well, one thing my organization has done -- I know rural water has done some of this as well -- we have six regions around the country and two of our regions operate a nationwide loan fund.

So if somebody needs money within a small amount of time, we have been able to capitalize loan funds from a variety of sources, typically foundations, rural development and other sources.

So that -- so that if there is a -- if there is like a tank

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failure or a pump failure and somebody needs money immediately it is really hard to go to a community bank and get that kind of funding. So they can come to our revolving loan funds for that funding and we turn it around in a couple of weeks.

Whereas if you try to go to rural development or the SRS you are looking at months and months and months. It just doesn't work.

Mr. Tonko. Thank you.

The technical assistance programs have been funded in the range of \$12 to \$15 million for a number of years now, this year at, I believe, \$12.7 million.

There are over 48,000 small systems across our country and these systems, indeed, are aging. So it seems to me that while this core funding is useful, inflation alone would suggest that a higher authorization for funding should at least be considered.

So I would ask both of our witnesses, both gentlemen, would a more generous funding level enable your organizations to better meet the needs of small utilities?

Mr. Mayfield. Yes, very much so it would. You know, we see the funding levels be real competitive when our systems, especially our smaller systems, have to go after the funding and you got some larger systems out there after the same funding. It

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is real competitive and having more funding would be a -- help a whole lot better.

Mr. Tonko. And you point out in your testimony that in addition to technical assistance, small systems also have difficulty getting access to capital.

So I assume that loans are not an option for many of these small systems and with a small rate base for further increases in water and sewer rates, it isn't a feasible option either.

It seems to me we need to provide additional funds to enable these systems to repair and replace older infrastructure. Would you agree?

Mr. Mayfield. I agree with that.

Mr. Tonko. And would you support legislation to reauthorize the SRF and increase the funding available?

Mr. Mayfield. Yes.

Mr. Tonko. Would greater funding for both the SRF and technical assistance be put to good use in these systems?

Mr. Mayfield. Very much so it would.

Mr. Tonko. Both of your organizations offer training and certification programs for small system operators. Is that correct?

Mr. Mayfield. That is correct.

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34

Mr. Tonko. And I have heard from several of my small water utilities that they are having a difficult time recruiting and retaining people to operate these systems and that many current operators are approaching retirement age. So the backup supply is of a concern.

Are there also workforce issues that we need to be concerned about, from your perspective?

Mr. Mayfield. We do see that. The aging workforce, we have seen lots of operators will be retiring in the near future and not many young people coming up and, you know, National Rural Water has been looking at it for several years now how we could recruit more young people into the organization.

Mr. Tonko. Now, do you think perhaps the lack of available pool of trained people, skilled people, interested people might be because we have ignored this issue?

Mr. Mayfield. Yes, sir. I sure do.

Mr. Tonko. Okay. Well, look, I appreciate your testimony and your support for the legislation. I hope to continue to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to address the other challenges our drinking water systems face and certainly with your very important input too. So thank you again for appearing before the subcommittee today.

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With that, I yield back.

Mr. Shimkus. Gentleman's time has expired.

Chair now recognizes the vice chair of the committee, Mr. Harper, for 5 minutes.

Mr. Harper. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And again thanks to you, Mr. Stewart, Mr. Mayfield, for being here. This is an issue that affects every community and our country.

Mr. Mayfield, how many local water associations are part of your organization?

Mr. Mayfield. There are 1,250 public utilities in the state of Mississippi and we have a 1,057 as our members. Of course, we still go help the ones that is not members, too.

Mr. Harper. So it is -- it is quite a responsibility then, isn't it?

Mr. Mayfield. Yes, sir. It really is.

Mr. Harper. Would you give maybe a specific example or two of the technical assistance that you provide to those association members?

Mr. Mayfield. Would love to.

In the Mississippi delta where the poverty is real low, we have a little town called Shaw, Mississippi up there. Shaw,

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Mississippi's chlorination equipment went down at one time. They could not provide the chlorination or the chlorine into the water so they just quit putting chlorine into the water.

Then their electrical control panels on their wells went down so they was having to go out there every day to turn the well on, fill the tank up and just hope it stayed full.

And this went on for about 3 months. The primacy agency put them under a boil water notice and then we finally got the call to go up there, and our circuit rider went in and it was just something the matter that was wrong with the chlorination equipment.

He got the chlorination equipment up and going. Went over to the wells and tanks and got the electrical control panel going and then he stayed with them to be sure they could pull some clear water samples. They got chlorine in the water.

This town was having to buy bottled water for their school every day for three months there and this circuit rider come in. Within just a matter of a few days, had this system back into compliance and up and running.

Mr. Harper. That is great.

Mr. Mayfield. That is just one of the many cases. In Wayne County, I mean, near Waynesboro, Mississippi, back last spring

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when we had a series of storms go through our state, one of our systems had a creek crossing blow out in the river over there.

Well, the operator of this system had cancer and had been sent to Houston for treatment and so when this creek crossing blew out the board members had to take it on their own with what few employees -- really, meter readers, basically -- didn't know where everything was and they searched for that leak for two days.

They called our -- called our office and I sent our circuit rider over there. Within about 4 hours he had to leave town in the creek.

But not only did he find the leak, he realized that without their operator there how desperate they was during this time. He stayed right there with them all day and almost night until they got the water fixed and back up and running.

Mr. Harper. That is great. And how many circuit riders do you have?

Mr. Mayfield. We have 3 circuit riders in Mississippi.

Mr. Harper. So they are pretty busy folks then, aren't they?

Mr. Mayfield. Ninety-five to 97 percent of their time is for calls only now.

Mr. Harper. Got it.

Mr. Mayfield. They are working calls.

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Mr. Harper. Got it. Well, why can't state regulators or EPA provide technical assistance for the regulations that they impose on communities?

Mr. Mayfield. The primacy agencies, you know, their guys is -- their men and women are engineers coming out of college. To be a circuit rider one of the national requirements is that you have a minimum of 5 years= experience actually out operating a system.

So our circuit riders can go out there and talk to these guys, men and women, just like they know everything going on. They have the hands-on experience of getting in that mud hole, fixing that leak, where these coming out of college does not have that experience. And it gives the operator as well as the circuit rider -- they bond a lot closer together being there.

Mr. Harper. That is great.

We had a hearing earlier in the year and some of your colleagues from Mississippi testified that of all the billions of dollars that Congress provides to the federal agencies for environmental programs the only technical assistance that small and rural communities see and utilize is the assistance from these on-site circuit riders.

Please explain a little more what you mean -- what they meant

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by that.

Mr. Mayfield. When these systems have a problem, we are the first call they make. I know you are from Mississippi and you have seen it advertised on TV, one call that is all. In the water business that is rural water.

That is the circuit riders. We are a one-stop shop. If they need technical managerial financial help we go in and help them.

We have went in, done great studies to where these systems have set there on their rates for years and years and not raised their rates and go in and help them get the rates at the right level and then they move forward from there.

Mr. Harper. You know, we just recognized the tenth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, and I know my time is almost up. But just briefly tell what you went through after that and what service you provided for those areas affected after Hurricane Katrina and other hurricanes.

Mr. Mayfield. That is a good question. Hurricane Katrina was something that none of us was prepared for but through the proper training we was ready for it.

Our water, as most of you know, much of the state of Mississippi was devastated by Hurricane Katrina. Within 5 to 6 days, 99 percent of our water systems was back up and running and

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this was due to the help of Rural Water and those operators having the proper training through this program here, training on how to react when something like this happens.

Rural Water jumped in and we got the easy systems up going, then we moved further south and we helped systems locate lines, locate leaks, fix leaks.

We brought crews in from all over the state and other states. Florida, Louisiana, Arkansas sent crews in and we stayed with Cedar Bay, St. Louis, some of the coastal towns for up to four to five weeks staff training.

Mr. Harper. Thank you, Mr. Mayfield. I appreciate it.

My time is up but thank you so much for what you do and mean to our state. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. Shimkus. Gentleman yields back the time.

The chair now recognizes ranking member of the full committee, Mr. Pallone, for 5 minutes.

Mr. Pallone. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As I said before, the bill before us is a small step forward on drinking water issues by reauthorizing technical assistance for small drinking water systems and I appreciate our ranking member and chairman who are working on this issue.

But I think it is unfortunate that we are considering the

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Senate language instead of similar language authored by Mr. Tonko to reauthorize this program because some of the terms in the Senate bill are unclear.

Hopefully, we can use this time to build the legislative history on this bill and clarify the legislation.

For example, in Section 4 paragraph 8 of S. 611, EPA is instructed to give priority to nonprofit organizations that are the most experienced. Similar language in Mr. Tonko's legislation would have given priority to the most effective organization. I think these terms are intended to be synonymous and we all agree that the money should go to the most effective organizations.

Mr. Mayfield, I wanted to ask you would you say that the NRWA is effective because of its extensive experience?

Mr. Mayfield. Yes, sir.

NRWA is a nationwide program and like I said earlier, all of our people has a minimum of at least 5 years= experience working in the field with all these systems. So I think we are very experienced at it.

Mr. Pallone. Thank you.

Mr. Stewart, do you agree that RCAP's experience in this area helps your organization be effective?

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Mr. Stewart. I don't think there is any doubt about it. But when you are talking about experience and whether or not that experience is effective or not, small utilities need a wide variety of expertise in order to help them.

You know, again, it is not just an operational issue about how to operate. You know, a lot of times they need somebody with the kind of background in accessing financing sources, budgeting, rate setting in order to get their financial situation in place.

But one thing, I think, that -- regardless, you know, I would hope Congress would look upon nonprofit organizations such as RCAP and National Rural Water Association as the best means to provide this assistance because in part we have people on ground -- on the ground in every single state. There are other people that have been doing this work who may address a part of the need.

But having the people on the ground with the experience and the expertise is the most effective way to do this.

Mr. Pallone. All right. Thanks.

I am mostly concerned that the bill could be interpreted as requiring EPA to conduct surveys in each of the states and territories to measure support for different nonprofit that might receive funds, and this would consume time and resources with little benefit.

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So Mr. Stewart, do you believe that EPA should be required to survey water systems in each state to determine which organizations provide the most beneficial services?

Mr. Stewart. I would say not. I think EPA is aware of the organizations that provide the best service and that having to do a survey would just reiterate and reinforce what they already know.

Mr. Pallone. Do you agree, Mr. Mayfield?

Mr. Mayfield. I would say not.

I would say that that should be left up to the organization presenting the proposal to EPA to explain to EPA how they are the most beneficial and provide the evidence.

Mr. Pallone. All right.

And the last thing I wanted to ask you is I am concerned that neither the existing statute nor the bill before us lists specific areas of technical assistance that would qualify for this funding.

Can you -- I will ask both of you -- give the subcommittee a sense of the range of activities that you carry out with this funding? Each of you, if you would.

Mr. Stewart. Well, it has varied over the years because what EPA has done is they have separated out a compliance section, a management finance section, a wastewater section and a private

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water well owner section. So and both NRW and RCAP has gotten different pieces of this funding over the years.

On the operational end, it has been very frustrating for me because we are constrained in not being able to provide management and finance assistance that supports the operational needs.

You know, so what we have done -- you know, we -- it is basically a compliance driven thing, like, how do you meet the revised Total Coliform Rule, how do you come into compliance with the ground water rule.

Well, that is all well and good but if you have, like, an arsenic problem that you are treating for the only way to come into compliance is to go through a financing arrangement where you are looking for funding to sort of, you know, provide the treatment -- to get the money to provide the treatment.

So that has been my frustration with the approach the EPA has used. You know, they obviously take the money that Congress provides and what they do with that money I don't think always is reflective of the intent of Congress.

Mr. Pallone. Mr. Mayfield.

Mr. Mayfield. We provide training and technical assistance and, you know, when we talk about technical assistance, like I said earlier, it is not just about the day to day operations in

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technical assistance.

So, for instance, December 23rd in Marion County, Mississippi, a tornado went through Columbia. We -- I had my people to verify with Columbia they was okay and Columbia came back and told us they was okay, everything was up and good and running.

At 2:30 a.m. on Christmas Eve morning we get a call that the generator at Columbia had went down and they are at the hospital sitting right next to the treatment plant and they inform me when they call me at 2:30 a.m. that morning that we got 2 hours of water supply left for this hospital -- what can you do to help us.

We jumped into action and at 4:45 a.m. that morning we had the generator hooked up and was pumping water. So it is about being there when you are needed, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Mr. Pallone. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Shimkus. Gentleman yields back his time.

Chair now recognizes the gentleman from West Virginia, Mr. McKinley, for 5 minutes.

Mr. McKinley. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to have a discussion on this subject and I am pleased to be one of the cosponsors of the legislation that we have.

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I represent in West Virginia another -- just like you, Mr. Mayfield -- a rural impoverished state that struggles. We have the highest rate of unemployment.

We have the second lowest per capita income in my district. I don't have -- I have two cities that have 30,000 people. Other than that, every community is smaller than that. Some -- I have got one community that only has 500 people, a seasonal community that maybe can grow to 2,000 during the winter. And they had a little problem.

Here is a -- here is a water line that they tried for 10 years to get funds for and it only has the ability to pass maybe about 22 percent of the water through that line. But they can't get money.

So I applaud this effort to try to get more technical assistance but I am -- but I am wondering if we are chasing the wrong rabbit.

I mean, it is good to get this, to get people lined up in the queue to get money. But we got to get the money. We got to have more money at the other end.

The state revolving fund has been used as a pawn and I know in 2013 the president in his budget slashed almost 50 percent out of the money, out of the SRO.

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47

And if it weren't for members on the other side of the aisle when working with the Appropriations Committee we were able to get that money restored.

But I don't know whether the administration and other people within the groups actually feel the need for rural America with the problems we have with us because this was done not with any -- well, not dime of federal money.

They finally had to get the state to step in because everyone was saying there was just no federal money. We can't do it because you are such a small community.

I have got another community that has 75 families, that they get their -- they have to get bottled water and they have been doing it for 2 years. They get their potable water so that they can flush their toilets out of a creek.

These are middle income people that have homes that are \$150,000 to \$200,000 in value and they can't sell their home. Who is going to buy a home that doesn't have water to it?

So I am very concerned about this. I want this legislation to pass. But I am equally and even more so concerned that we are giving false hope to people, get people in the queue to get money but there is no money because the allocation in the administration or whatever the programs are they are not funding it into rural

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48

communities to be able to help out on that.

I know it. All the words sound right but in the real world I think as we live in, small communities aren't getting that money.

And so what would you do then to help refocus this so that this administration or any administration can understand the hardship that is incurring on small towns, these little communities of 500 or 1,000 people? What would you do to get more money into that account?

Mr. Mayfield. Well, I think that is something that we need to sit down and take a long look at, that the smaller systems gets more -- is looked at more then they can be as competitive as the larger systems are.

Let me justB

Mr. McKinley. Would you agree that one of the -- but one of the criteria they always say is where is your matching money. But a small town of 500 can't come up with that matching money.

They have -- I have got a community that has to come up with \$12.5 million. What are they going to do? They only have 550 customers.

Mr. Mayfield. That is right. And there, again, at some point in time, that is where consolidation and merging may have to come into the picture when these smaller towns cannot come up

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with this matching money.

Mr. Stewart. Honestly, there is no doubt that the water utilities in this country are under invested and it is not just the EPA SRF programs. It is Rural Development Water and Environment programs. They need more funding because you can't have one without the other. You need the technical assistance.

One thing -- for EPA's credit and Rural Development also is that they have been stressing just like our two organizations have for 40 years, asset management. You know, how do you take care of the equipment, the facilities that you have.

And so EPA has been pushing on that, both of our organizations have been pushing on that to sort of, you know, maintain that investment, you know, once it is actually made.

But if you don't make the investment and as we know this country is still growing, you know, and there are still needs that haven't been met. There is people in your state and in many other states that don't even have community water systems that are hauling water.

And without that kind of investment those people are never going to get community water systems.

So I think both NRW and RCAP -- I can't speak for NRW. RCAP definitely supports increased funding for the SRF programs and

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50

the water environment program.

Mr. McKinley. I have run out of time but can you just give me an idea of what kind of money should we be spending, knowing that the SRF is just amount and there are other sources. What kind of money should we be spending annually?

Mr. Stewart. That is a tough one because, I mean, as we have heard, the needs are so great. The needs are in the trillions.

I mean, an incremental increase, I mean, even if it was just 10 percent a year in each of those two programs, I mean, something to start making a dent in the backlog that we have seen anything would help.

Mr. McKinley. Would you agree?

Mr. Mayfield. I totally agree.

Mr. McKinley. Thank you. I yield back my time.

Mr. Shimkus. Gentleman's time has expired.

Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Green, for 5 minutes.

Mr. Green. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling the hearing as part of the subcommittee's ongoing work on drinking water issues.

Safe drinking water is a serious issue in our district as it is likely for every member of this subcommittee. Small and

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rural water systems face a number of very serious challenges and do not have the customer base to finance serious infrastructure repairs they need.

Customers of public water systems in the country should be able to count on safety of the water coming out of their taps whether they live in a rural area, cities or suburbs.

My question to the panelists, first of all, I have a very urban area but I also represent an unincorporated area that will not be annexed by our major cities because the property wealth is so low it would cost more to serve those areas with streets and water and sewer than it is to -- so they are actually hemmed in by cities.

And we have been able in the past to use assistance with matching funds to be able to bring down some of -- from -- for even very small urban water systems.

How can consolidation help small and rural water systems, for example, in whether it be a rural area like Mississippi or even in an urban area like I have?

Mr. Mayfield. You get more customer base, therefore you keep your rates as low as you can and more customers actually can help pay those loans and grants that you receive.

I would like to, if I could, just step back just a quick second

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on technical assistance. When we are talking about technical assistance, one thing that is real good about our technical assistance providers, these men and women stay up on the latest technology out there, and when these towns, like you are talking about does go for loans and grants the engineer gives them a preliminary engineer report.

Now, lots of times our circuit riders can sit down with these towns and look at this preliminary engineer report and say look, there is a cheaper and better way to do it.

So we need to get these technical assistance providers working with these towns and cities on a case by case basis when it comes to these loans and grants.

Mr. Stewart. Mr. Green, if I can just make a comment, and since Texas is my home state, as you know water availability is a big issue in Texas and if you have small communities that can come together and that can access either service or ground water, I mean, you have a much better chance of doing that, and we have always tried to get the cities -- even if you are not annexing you can perhaps provide wholesale water or just do water and wastewater services in those areas by extending their CCNs.

Mr. Green. Well, our situation we have done that. City of Houston has been able to -- of course, you have to bring money

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53

to the table to make sure the city taxpayers are not doing it, but they would sell the water.

Of course, in our area we still use ground water but mostly it is surface water because it is decided for the last sixty years and flooding issues.

Mr. Stewart, when you testified before the subcommittee in February you mentioned several alternative service delivery approaches including sharing services, cooperative operations and management consolidation. How can these alternative approaches help small systems achieve better compliance? Is it -- is there some bureaucratic rule that you can't do it or is it just a matter of --

Mr. Stewart. No, I think it is a matter of having somebody that is facilitating getting multiple communities to work together, you know, so that -- so that, you know, maybe you have two or three communities that are close enough and they can share an operator instead of hiring their own, you know.

But sometimes, even though water systems are pretty good about knowing what is going on in their counties and stuff, you know, if you have somebody that can sort of facilitate those kind of sharing of service arrangements I think that is a -- that can make a big difference.

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Mr. Green. Okay. Last Congress, our subcommittee introduced legislation, the AQUA Act, that would expand the definition of restricting for the SRF, the state revolving fund program, to explicitly include cooperative partnerships and joint personal agreements and consolidation.

Mr. Stewart, would you support that change?

Mr. Stewart. Yes, very much so. Yes.

Mr. Green. And, again, in Texas there are challenges confronting water systems in my own state that are unique compared to other states, although I would compare some of my rural areas in east Texas with Mississippi -- same problems.

Are there differences and challenges confronting rural water systems and small systems in urbanized areas like that are found in my north and east Houston -- Harris County area -- between a rural system and an urban system?

Mr. Stewart. Well, you know, the economies of scale, like Mr. Mayfield and a couple have mentioned, are one issue. You know, part of the problem with small communities is just -- can be availability of water, as you know, and I know in the Houston area, you know, you are getting off ground water and going to surface water, which is necessary. But --

Mr. Green. Well, and most of the surface water we are

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getting is owned by the city of Houston, by the way.

Mr. Stewart. Yes. So you are just at a -- I hate to say, a competitive disadvantage if you are a small system and you are looking for water rights or for access to groundwater resources. You are just at a disadvantage, no doubt.

Mr. Green. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the testimony and our witnesses.

Mr. Shimkus. Gentleman yields back his time.

We are waiting for Mr. McNerney to rapidly get here. So what I would like to just mention without objection is just talk about our push in southern Illinois to really encourage a lot of systems to move into a regional system -- rural water, USDA rural water.

It has been very successful because what I have observed is older systems, new regulations, small community, small rate based -- as all the things that have been mentioned here, there is no ability to borrow the money, pay the rates.

And so only through encouraging over time, you know, respectfully that most of my -- most of my areas we are starting to close gaps in systems so that -- and then the important thing is to make sure that we have clean potable water for our -- my constituents and stuff and that has been -- it has been a very, very successful program that we have worked on. It is very

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56

gratifying. It has been one of the things that I have been most proud of.

This kind of untold story is when you can get safe drinking water to people who really haven't had or who have had to haul it for a time. So I am filibustering.

Anyone want to add to that issue? We have kind of talked about it. Mr. Stewart.

Mr. Stewart. Yes. Again, I think that, you know, in support of technical assistance, in order to facilitate regionalization you need somebody on the ground that can work with multiple communities that knows all about the finance management and technical aspects of it and that can think about different opportunities for communities to work together because, as you know, Chairman, this is not necessarily a physical consolidation.

Maybe it is a managerial consolidation over multiple satellite systems. You know, again, for lack of a better word, there is more efficiencies. But, you know, if you are operating a small system and you are just trying to make the water come -- you know, come out of the pipe every day, you have a hard time looking forward, you know, a year in advance of what you need to be doing.

Mr. Shimkus. Thank you very much.

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57

And I think the chair is going to recognize my colleague and friend, obviously, since I waited for him, the gentleman from California, Mr. McNerney, for 5 minutes.

Mr. McNerney. Well, I thank the chairman for your patience and I thank the witnesses.

Mr. Mayfield, it sounds like the circuit rider is a pretty interesting job. You get to go around and see different things just about every day.

Mr. Mayfield. A new experience every day.

Mr. McNerney. Is that -- but that is a state-funded organization. You don't get any money from the federal government about that?

Mr. Mayfield. We do get some money from USDA for the circuit rider program.

Mr. McNerney. So they are helpful then. But this proposed legislation would help that then?

Mr. Mayfield. That is correct.

Mr. McNerney. Good.

Mr. Stewart, I get the impression that you feel the EPA is well-meaning in terms of its new regulations. It is going to make water safer and, in fact, also well meaning in terms of trying to provide assistance. But they kind of miss the mark in their

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intention. Is that right?

Mr. Stewart. Yes, sir.

I believe that they could be better -- they could better direct the kind of resources for where the needs are the greatest.

Mr. McNerney. Would the proposed legislation help?

Mr. Stewart. I think that is a -- this is a great first step in that direction.

Mr. McNerney. Thank you.

Mr. Stewart, would planning and adapting to drought and other emergencies related to climate change be an acceptable technical assistance under current statute?

Mr. Stewart. Yes, it is, because I know both Rural Water and RCAP are working with each other. We work with quite a few systems in the central valley of California that are having issues, you know, some that are actually still considered colonias in Riverside County and they have not only drought issues but, as you know, arsenic issues -- just water quality issues.

So yes. I mean, that is an acceptable use for the funding currently.

Mr. McNerney. All right.

And the current legislation wouldn't change that?

Mr. Stewart. Not to my knowledge.

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Mr. McNerney. Okay. Good.

Mr. Mayfield, do you agree that the current statute protects you for planning for climate change or adapting to climate change?

Mr. Mayfield. Yes, I agree with that.

Mr. McNerney. Thank you.

I am going to be brief here. Mr. Stewart, do you think the bill would restrict your ability to offer technical assistance in moving drinking water intakes or finding alternative source water?

Mr. Stewart. No, I think that is -- I think when you are talking about compliance you are talking not only the quality but availability and quantity. So I think that is all -- we have never been told that that wouldn't be an acceptable use of the technical assistance money.

Mr. McNerney. Is identifying and mitigating contamination acceptable technical assistance under current law?

Mr. Stewart. Well, that is more of a source water protection kind of an issue the EPA has at times in the past funded separately. It is eligible but that is not really what -- if you look at the RFAs that come out from EPA for those purposes that is not what their emphasis has been. I would say that.

Mr. McNerney. Would the new bill change that, in your

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60

opinion?

Mr. Stewart. See, I am not sure -- that is for you all to decide. I mean, you know, what you direct EPA to do and then what they do can be two different things and I am not the one to decide, you know, who is right -- who is right on that. That is --

Mr. McNerney. The chairman is smiling on this.

Mr. Stewart. That is for you all to do, right.

Mr. McNerney. Well, Mr. Mayfield, you offer training to monitor for and mitigate contamination. Is that right?

Mr. Mayfield. That is correct. Yes, sir.

Mr. McNerney. And that sounds like most of the time you are just reacting to crises. But you actually have some amount of resources to deploy in terms of training as well?

Mr. Mayfield. Yes, sir.

Before the money started getting cut through EPA, Mississippi had two, like, Mr. Stewart was talking about, source water people on the staff that was out in the field every day dealing with these type of problems. But, you know, when funding got cut we had to lay those two people off. But we still do it through training.

Mr. McNerney. Thank you.

Well, I think the assistance is very important. It will only

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become more so as climate change exacerbates the problems of our drinking water sources. So I hope we can continue to work together on these problems.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Shimkus. Maybe I shouldn't have waited but -- no, I am glad I did.

So with that, seeing no other member wishing to ask questions we want to thank you all for traveling and spending time with us. We look forward to kind of moving promptly to try to get this through our system, get it to the floor so hopefully we can meet the time schedules that we all know that we need to meet.

So with that, I will call the hearing adjourned.

[The statement of the Environmental Protection Agency follows:]

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[Whereupon, at 11:07 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]

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