

**Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Environment hearing on
Hearing on “Reinvestment and Rehabilitation of Our Nation’s Safe
Drinking Water Delivery Systems”
March 16, 2017**

(As prepared for delivery)

While last year’s drinking water crisis in Flint, Michigan drew the country’s attention to one community; we all have communities in our states that have discovered they, too, have issues with their water supply and distribution systems. Today, our committee begins a review of the financial needs of our entire nation's drinking water infrastructure. Of course, we need to learn from Flint to make sure the same mistakes are never repeated, but it is important that we don't simply confine our view to just a few solutions. We need to think broadly about all the things that can impact water affordability, reliability, and safety.

The president strongly supports making newer and larger investments in our nation's infrastructure and I agree that we need to protect these assets. But we must ensure wise investments and diversified efforts make sense and make us better prepared for our future.

It is not enough to look at the latest water needs assessment issued by EPA -- or any other group for that matter -- and conclude the simple solution is directing more federal money at the problem. Moreover, the price of pipe or a new treatment facility is not the only cost driver -- regulations are a significant cost and we know that poorly designed ones can contribute to cost problems. To the extent that existing and new regulations, as well as emerging contaminants are an issue, we should not diminish the importance of tools like the Drinking Water State Revolving Loan fund, which has helped many water utilities afford compliance with federal mandates.

Obviously, these are serious issues and we must delve beneath the surface of these matters and ask hard questions, like where the line should be drawn between federal investment and local responsibility, what existing practices or resources can become used in new partnerships to solve these problems, and where can technology be applied in ways that make our systems smarter and not just newer.

I know these are not easy questions, but I know together we can find the answers. I want to thank our witnesses for joining us today and I look forward to hearing their testimony.