

Opening Statement of the Honorable John Shimkus
Subcommittee on Environment
Hearing on “Discussion Draft: Brownfields Reauthorization”
April 4, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

The Subcommittee will now come to order. The Chair recognizes himself for 5 minutes.

I would like to welcome everyone as we roll up our sleeves and continue our work to reauthorize and improve the EPA’s Brownfields Program.

The EPA Brownfields Program is vital to states and local communities as they try to address contaminated industrial and commercial properties and return them to productive use. Cleaning up these sites is great for the economy because brownfields grants can be directly leveraged into jobs, additional redevelopment funds, and increased residential and commercial property values. At this Subcommittee’s first hearing earlier this year we also heard how important brownfields funding and cleanup is to promoting investment in new infrastructure and to better utilizing our existing infrastructure.

Last year the Subcommittee held a hearing to look at what works in the Brownfields Program and what we could do to improve it. I know that our friends on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee have held similar hearings and I think we can all agree that the Brownfields Program is essential to protect. I think we can also agree that a primary goal is to fully fund the program and get as many cleanups done, and get as many people involved in the cleanup process, as we can. To that end, there were some legislative fixes identified in previous hearings that would further this goal and make the program even better.

Which brings us to this morning. We are looking at a Discussion Draft that incorporates the fixes suggested by our witnesses – in fact, I see a couple familiar faces from our hearing last year – welcome back Mr. Anderson and Mayor Bollwage.

The Discussion Draft contains improvements to the Brownfields Program such as the creation of multipurpose grants that can be used for multiple purposes – including brownfields assessment and cleanup – and which will provide flexibility to communities trying to cleanup multiple brownfields sites within an area in the

community. The Discussion Draft also provides liability relief to municipalities who involuntarily acquire brownfields property by virtue of its function as a sovereign, which will allow local units of government to address contamination on property they acquire through tax delinquency, bankruptcy, or abandonment. The legislation also increases the limit for remediation grants from \$200,000 to \$500,000 – which, as we heard from many witnesses, will make it easier for brownfields sites to get cleaned up. The bill provides for a limited amount of the grant funds to be used for administrative costs, which will allow small and rural communities to be able to receive and utilize grant funds.

We have confidence that these provisions and the others in the Discussion Draft will make the Brownfields Program even more successful and we hope that our witnesses today will tell us what they like about the bill and also tell us what improvements we should make. If there are additional legislative provisions that would help further the goal of getting more sites cleaned up – we hope that we can work with the stakeholders here today and with our colleagues to think creatively about how to incorporate such changes into the Discussion Draft going forward. Including looking at Good Samaritans – people who volunteer their services or capital to get brownfields sites cleaned up – and ways to encourage them to participate in the cleanup process.

I would like to welcome our panel of State and local brownfields experts who will share with us their first-hand knowledge and experience with the Brownfields Program. I hope that together we can take a closer look at the Discussion Draft and figure out what else we can do to improve the Brownfields Program and the Brownfields Law.

The Chair now recognizes the Ranking Member Mr. Tonko for 5 minutes for his opening statement.