

Opening Statement of the Honorable Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Energy Hearing on “H.R. __, Drinking Water System
Improvement Act and Related Issues of Funding, Management, and
Compliance Assistance under the Safe Drinking Water Act”
May 19, 2017

In March, our committee began a review of the financial needs of our entire nation's drinking water infrastructure. We spoke about the need to think broadly about all the things that can affect water affordability, reliability, and safety.

Today we take the next steps in our deliberative process by reviewing a discussion draft and related ideas from stakeholders to formulate policy on drinking water state revolving loan funding and public water system supervision grants. We will also examine efforts to improve asset management by utilities, and other ways to lift paperwork burdens and improve systems' delivery of safe drinking water.

Both sides of the aisle support making newer and larger investments in our nation's infrastructure and I agree that we need to help ensure these assets support the great quality of life Americans enjoy in the future. However, in doing so, we must be careful to select wise investments and create diversified options that make sense for water systems, states, and consumers. It is important for us to tackle this job seriously for a couple reasons.

As we learned at the last hearing, the country's drinking water delivery systems are facing the challenges of older age. We learned from

the water utilities and other stakeholders the importance of partnerships for addressing growth and compliance issues. The discussion draft proposes language to allow contractual arrangements for management and engineering services that will get a water system into compliance. We welcome feedback on that approach.

We also received testimony on the need to increase funding for the Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund and the Public Water System Supervision grants, but not specific recommendations about what a realistic number is – or whether budgetary cuts will offset these increases. For the last couple years, the appropriated levels have been consistent; the appropriations for the Drinking Water Revolving Loan Fund were last authorized in 2003. That is long enough. It is time to reassert this committee’s proper role in authorizing our statutes, and realign the focus of the EPA and other agencies back to the core missions: in this case ensuring the provision of Safe Drinking Water for our nation’s consumers. We look forward to continuing the dialogue on this as our process continues.

I want to welcome all our witnesses who took time and traveled from far and wide to be with us to comment on the discussion draft. Your input is important, and we would appreciate as specific of recommendations as you are able to give on these important issues.