

Opening Statement for Chairman Gary Palmer

Subcommittee on Environment

Committee on Energy & Commerce

Hearing: “From Source to Tap: A Hearing to Examine Challenges and Opportunities for Safe, Reliable, and Affordable Drinking Water.”

February 24, 2026

Good morning and welcome to Ranking Members Pallone and Tonko, my colleagues, and to our witnesses for this hearing of the Subcommittee on the Environment.

Today’s hearing provides a timely and important opportunity to examine the safety, reliability and affordability of our nation’s drinking water system.

For those you have been following the news in recent weeks, a sewer line in suburban Maryland ruptured in January and released more than 200 million gallons of untreated sewage into the Potomac River, which separates Maryland and D.C. from Virginia and is the main source of drinking water for millions of Americans and visitors to the national capital region.

The D.C. government just last week declared a state of emergency as a result of the sewage spill, and President Trump has directed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Federal Emergency Management Agency to take a lead role in coordinating the cleanup and response to this unfortunate incident.

Given the significance of the spill and its potential impact on public health, interstate commerce, and drinking water and the environment in the nation’s capital region, this Committee has begun an investigation into what was known about the risks of this rupture and if it could have been avoided.

Local authorities say the drinking water supply has not been affected, and that the intakes at Great Falls are located up river from the sewage spill and that the intakes at Little Falls have been closed.

DC Water was contacted but declined to testify at today's hearing.

Congress first enacted the Safe Drinking Water Act more than 50 years ago and amended it several times since. One of the goals of this hearing is to hear how the law is working and what if anything needs to be modernized to address current challenges.

Many Americans receive their drinking water from publicly owned water utilities who have to navigate the law's complicated regulatory requirements, manage both aging infrastructure and an aging workforce, and provide safe and affordable water to their customers.

We will hear from two of these utilities today: Eric Hill, General Manager of the Russellville (Alabama) Water & Sewer Board and Lindsey Rechten, President & CEO of the Northern Kentucky Water District.

In recent years, Congress has appropriated EPA more than \$1 billion annually for the Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund, an important source of infrastructure funding for states and local utilities.

However, as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, EPA received a supplemental appropriation of more than \$50 billion for water infrastructure. I look forward to hearing from EPA's Deputy Inspector General about how EPA has been using that money and whether taxpayers have gotten what they paid for, or if these precious taxpayer funds are at risk.

We will also hear from a witness from the Natural Resources Defense Council with a background on water issues.

I thank the witnesses for their input and look forward to working with my colleagues on the Committee to identify commonsense solutions to protecting and modernizing our drinking water system.