Chairman Brett Guthrie
Opening Statement—Subcommittee on Environment
"Reliable Water in the Digital Age: Examining Legislation to Strengthen Drinking Water Systems and Protect Ratepayers"
September 3, 2026

As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Chairman Palmer, for holding this hearing, and to our witnesses for being here to discuss ways to improve drinking water infrastructure throughout the United States to ensure Americans have access to safe, reliable, and affordable drinking water.

Since the beginning of the 119th Congress, the Energy and Commerce Committee has led the way in advancing policies that both support economic growth and protect our environment while ensuring the United States wins the race to AI dominance over China.

Today, we will be considering two pieces of draft legislation: the first is a bill to reauthorize key Safe Drinking Water Act programs and provide continued investment in our nation's drinking water infrastructure, as well as expand cybersecurity protections. Safe and reliable drinking water is fundamental to the health of our families, strengthening our communities, and enhancing the quality of life Americans expect and deserve.

The second bill, the Water Cost Accountability Act, would ensure that data centers – which are necessary to support our modern economy

and win the AI race – are the ones responsible for paying the costs associated with connecting to public water systems.

The rapid growth of data centers has sparked an important conversation across the country. This Subcommittee has worked on legislation to support locating data centers at brownfield sites where there is already power and water infrastructure, but ultimately these decisions are up to local communities and the companies that want to make these investments.

In my district, in Hancock County, KY, one company is making a $4 billion investment to repurpose a former aluminum smelter along the Ohio River into a data center campus. This investment is expected to bring significant resources to the local schools and grow the regional economy.

Every community should be able to choose whether data center development is right for them. Those decisions, and the negotiations that come with them, should remain where they belong – at the local level. This bill does not dictate those decisions to move forward, it simply provides an important protection for consumers.

If a community chooses to welcome a data center, the customers already connected to that water system should not be left paying for the infrastructure needed to serve it. Families and businesses can have peace of mind that their water rates will not increase to subsidize a new data

center, while communities and developers can focus on the potential benefits these investments can bring.

The good news is that many large tech companies have already made public commitments to not only provide or pay for their own water for data centers, but some have even started replenishing local water supplies beyond what they consume, making data center development a net positive in their communities. Today's discussion draft simply ensures a level of accountability that will lead to even further growth and development.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, and I yield back.