

**Members Day Hearing – March 16, 2017**

**Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations & Related Programs**

**Testimony of Rep. Earl Blumenauer (OR-03)**

Thank you for having us here today. Your job is more important now than ever, as the new Administration pledges to offset increases in defense with cuts to important discretionary spending.

I, along with many of my colleagues across the aisle, am deeply concerned about the impact slashing funding to the State Department and our foreign assistance programs will have on U.S. security. As you know well, American diplomacy, soft power and foreign aid are critical components of our national security strategy.

One issue that has been a top priority of mine in Congress is ensuring sustainable, equitable access to clean water and sanitation services for the world's poorest.

The need is clear. The facts are staggering. 663 million people – twice the U.S. population – now live without drinking water for their daily survival. 1.8 billion people live without water that is safe to drink before treatment. And 2.4 billion people live without a proper place to go to the bathroom, leading to preventable death, disease, physical stunting and impaired cognitive development across Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Not only do we have a moral responsibility to invest in lifting communities out of poverty, but there's a strategic incentive to do so.

The U.S. intelligence community's 2012 assessment on Global Water Security found that, during the next 10 years, many countries important to the United States will experience water problems that will risk instability and state failure, increase regional tensions, and distract them from working with the United States on important U.S. policy objectives.

Across the globe, water imbalances accelerate, magnify, and multiply myriad security threats to the U.S. and our allies. These threats include water-related diseases such as Ebola and cholera, and droughts leading to destabilizing famines.

Then, there are the threats of transboundary water-related conflict. Water, or the lack thereof, destabilizes countries. We've seen this in Syria where the drought drove people from the countryside to the cities – exacerbating the country's underlying political challenges and fueling the civil war.

The Gaza Strip is on the verge of a similar crisis. Home to nearly two million people, Gaza is one of the most water-stressed areas on the planet. The water supply, largely groundwater, is being rapidly depleted and polluted. It will soon be unfit for human consumption, as it is contaminated with sewage from above and with salt-water encroachment into the aquifer from the Mediterranean Sea below.

I've been particularly concerned with this crisis because of the broader impacts water depletion in Gaza could have on stability in the Middle East, and on Israeli security.

There is power in water diplomacy.

We can prevent crises, create the conditions for peace, and find new ways to approach historically tense dialogues. The recent agreement to renew the Israeli-Palestinian Joint Water Committee is a case in point.

But, these problems are not solvable without U.S. funding and leadership.

Thanks to you, the United States is playing a greater role in providing access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) to the world's poorest than ever before. This increased investment in WASH must continue. Not only will it save more lives and benefit U.S. strategic interests, but it will increase overall aid effectiveness.

There is nothing more fundamental to families and global health than clean water and sanitation.

Your inclusion of robust funding in the Fiscal Year 2018 Appropriations bill to maintain U.S. leadership in this sphere is critical.