

Press Release

Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee Holds First Hearing

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The House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure held its first Subcommittee hearing in the 110th Congress under the leadership of the new Chairman, Rep. James L. Oberstar (Minn.) on Friday, January 19. Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (Tex.), Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment, presided over the hearing. It focused on *The Need for Renewed Investment in Clean Water Infrastructure*.

Chairwoman Johnson opened the hearing with the following statement:

"Today, the Subcommittee meets to discuss the nation's wastewater infrastructure needs and the importance of a renewed commitment to addressing these needs. As this is the first meeting of the Subcommittee this Congress, I believe this is a good opportunity to outline the near-term agenda of this Subcommittee, and our efforts to address many of the water resource challenges of this country.

As my predecessor, Congressman Duncan has described, this Subcommittee has the broadest agenda of any of the Transportation Subcommittees, covering Corps of Engineers' projects and authorities, EPA's Clean Water and Superfund programs, brownfields, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the St. Lawrence Seaway, and programs carried out by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The Subcommittee will have an active agenda in the coming weeks. Starting with today's hearing, the Subcommittee will return to some of the unfinished work of the previous Congress, beginning with an examination of the wastewater infrastructure needs of the nation, and the importance of a renewed Federal commitment to meeting these needs. The Subcommittee hopes to move expeditiously towards a reauthorization of the Clean Water State Revolving Fund.

It is my hope that we can build upon the prior bipartisan efforts of this Subcommittee, and move this legislation through the Committee to the floor of the House before the President's Day district work period.

In addition, the Subcommittee hopes to take up other bipartisan legislative proposals considered by this Committee in the previous Congress that were not enacted into law. Two examples are legislation to reauthorize appropriations for EPA's Combined Sewer Overflow grant program,

and the pilot program for alternative sources of water.

An equally important priority of the Subcommittee is to complete work on the Water Resources Development Act of 2006. Late in the 109th Congress, the staffs of the House and Senate authorizing committees were close to completing what we have waited six years to accomplish – moving a joint House-Senate recommendation for the Army Corps of Engineers to the President.

It is my hope that we can quickly pick up where these negotiations left off so that vital water resources development legislation can be enacted, and the backlog of essential flood control, navigation, and ecosystem restoration projects can finally be authorized.

Finally, in February, the Committee and the Subcommittee will hold hearings on the administration's budget request for fiscal year 2008. While I do not have high expectations for full funding of those programs and policies that fall within the jurisdiction of this Subcommittee, I look forward to beginning the dialogue on funding this Committee's priorities in the coming fiscal year.

Returning to the topic of today's hearing, it is fitting that the Subcommittee's first hearing is on the need for renewed investment in Clean Water infrastructure. To a great extent, the improvements in water quality achieved since the enactment of the Clean Water Act have resulted from significant investment by Congress in wastewater infrastructure improvements throughout the country.

Since 1972, the Federal government has provided more than \$82 billion for wastewater infrastructure and other assistance which has dramatically increased the number of Americans enjoying better water quality, and has improved the health of the economy and the environment. During the same period, overall investment in wastewater infrastructure – from Federal, State, and local sources – has been over \$250 billion.

Investment in wastewater infrastructure has been one of the greatest investments made by the Federal government, and has provided significant environmental, public health, and economic benefits to the nation. First through the Construction Grants program, and now through the Clean Water State Revolving Funds, these investments have been integral to improving the nation's waters, as well as ensuring the well-being of our nation's citizens.

In addition, as noted in the testimony for today's hearing, investment in wastewater infrastructure directly benefits our nation's economy, not only through the creation of well-paying jobs here in the United States, but also through ensuring that our nation's infrastructure stands ready to address the challenges of the 21st century.

However, these achievements are now at risk. As noted in a 2000 report of the Environmental Protection Agency, "without continued improvements in wastewater treatment infrastructure, future population growth will erode away many of the Clean Water Act achievements...." Without a renewed commitment towards investment from all parties, in less than a generation, the United States could lose much of the gains made in improving water quality.

This Subcommittee stands ready to renew the Federal commitment to our nation's wastewater infrastructure. While reauthorization of the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, alone, cannot entirely close the gap between current needs and expenditure, it does send a strong message on the importance of achieving the goals of fishable and swimmable waters established over 30 years ago. "