

**Statement of
The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment
Hearing On
“Revitalization of the Environmental Protection Agency’s
Brownfields Program”
February 14, 2008**

Good afternoon. I welcome everyone to our hearing today on the reauthorization of the Environmental Protection Agency’s brownfields program.

I have a deep appreciation for the subject matter of today’s hearing because I have been able to witness, firsthand, the many positive effects that brownfields redevelopment affords to local communities. In the heart of my congressional district, and very close to my district office, lies the 72-acre site known as the Victory Park.

This former industrial wasteland, once polluted by an old paint factory, a meatpacking plant, a train yard, and a 100-year-old grain silo that had been forgotten by time, is now home to the American Airlines Center, the W-Dallas hotel, and high-rise apartments and condominiums, as well as retail and commercial enterprises.

This dramatic turnaround would not have been possible without the assistance of the State’s voluntary cleanup program, and the partnership of EPA, the City of Dallas, and private developers. Instead of blight and depressed areas, this Dallas community now enjoys the benefits of vibrant economic growth, expanded employment, and increased revenue from productive use of the properties. Simply put, for Dallas, the Brownfields program has been an overwhelming success story – and one that can and should be replicated throughout the nation.

Today, we begin the discussion on reauthorization and revitalization of the Brownfields program. This program, which was conceived and initiated in the Clinton administration, and legislatively enacted in the Bush administration, has proven to be a necessary catalyst to the revitalization of underutilized sites, and the preservation of undeveloped areas. The Brownfields program generates jobs and economic activity; it allows for the efficient use of transportation resources; and, it helps restore and maintain the environment.

However, the Brownfields program has been unnecessarily constrained since its enactment – principally thought under-investment by the administration and the appropriations process. Mr. Chairman, as President Bush said when signing the Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfields Revitalization Act in 2002, “This is a good jobs creation bill.”

That is why it is so frustrating to see the Brownfields program consistently and dramatically under-funded. Congress authorized and the President supported a funding level of \$200 million annually for site assessment and cleanup. Yet, appropriations for the Brownfields assessment and cleanup program peaked at \$97.7 million in fiscal year 2002. Since that time, appropriations for the site assessment and cleanup component of Brownfields grants have hovered around \$90 million annually.

I applaud the President for requesting slightly increased funding levels for site assessment and cleanup grants in his fiscal year 2009 budget. However, the additional \$100,000 proposed will not likely have a significant impact in addressing the backlog of pending Brownfields applications. For example, last year, EPA received 810 proposals for funding that passed its threshold requirements for eligibility. Yet, EPA could only fund 294 individual proposals – or just 36 percent of requests for funding.

While this fact is, itself, concerning, so is the fact that the gap between eligible project applications and available funding continues to widen. For example, just two years ago, EPA could fund roughly one-in-three applications. However, as more communities learn of the potential benefits of Brownfields remediation, we should expect that the number of applications for funding will continue to increase.

I expect that many of our witnesses this afternoon will discuss the importance of Brownfields cleanup for the revitalization of neighborhoods, for placing underutilized properties back on local-tax rolls, and for protection of human health and the environment. However, I believe that restoration of Brownfields also has a tremendous economic stimulus effect on our cities and neighborhoods. In these uncertain economic times, we need to focus our efforts on ways that Federal investments can have a real, beneficial impact on the lives and livelihoods of our citizens. I can think of few, more-beneficial impacts than job creation and economic development.

As EPA stated last week in its Committee budget briefing materials, the Brownfields program “has resulted in the assessment of more than 11,500 properties ... and helped create more than 47,000 jobs.” If this is the success rate of an underfunded program, imagine the economic impact and potential for job creation that could come from actually funding all of the applications that are submitted to the Agency each year. I do not believe we have seen all the good that this program can do for our communities and for helping American families.

I am glad that the Subcommittee begins today the discussion on reauthorization and revitalization of the Brownfields program

###