

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

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, for holding today’s hearing on the reauthorization of the Brownfields law.

In 2001, when the Brownfields conference report was considered on the House floor, I predicted that this important bipartisan legislation would “help significantly in the redevelopment of many abandoned and long-forgotten properties dotting our nation’s city and community centers.” In light of this program’s successes over the past seven years, and the comments of today’s witnesses, I would say that these predictions were true.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the federal Brownfields program has resulted in the assessment and reuse of thousands of properties throughout the nation, and has led to the creation of more than 47,000 jobs. In addition, the roughly \$1 billion in federally appropriated funds for Brownfields have leveraged roughly \$10.3 billion in cleanup and redevelopment revenues – a roughly 10-to-1 return on our federal investment.

The Brownfields law fashioned the perfect combination of federal funding for site assessments and cleanups, and limited Superfund liability exemptions for innocent landowners, prospective purchasers of contaminated property, and contiguous property owners – persons who were never intended to be subject to federal liability – to assist in the identification and remediation of Brownfields properties.

Both components – the federal funding, and the limited Superfund liability exemptions – have been integral to the overall success of the program. In fact, according to stakeholders, including many testifying this morning, the greatest limitation on the programs’ success has been its lack of full funding. Accordingly, due to insufficient funds for the assessment and cleanup components, the Brownfields program has yet to reach its full potential in redeveloping the great number of remaining underutilized or abandoned commercial and industrial sites.

I remain concerned that this administration claims that “Brownfields cleanup and redevelopment [continue to be a] top environmental priorit[y],” but time and again, fails to carry through with this commitment. This administration has repeatedly stated that it fully funds Brownfields cleanup, yet its long-term budget requests for the site assessment and cleanup component of the Brownfields – the shovels in the ground – have never come close to the authorized level of \$200 million annually. In fact, the President’s fiscal year 2009 budget request for Brownfields grants is only slightly higher than the lowest budget request **ever made** for the program only two years ago.

Unfortunately for our cities and communities, the additional \$82,000 included in the President’s budget for site assessment and cleanup funding will not bring us much closer in

addressing the roughly 600 Brownfields grant applications received annually that must go unanswered due to a lack of available resources.

It is time that we rekindle the debate on reauthorization of the Brownfields program, as the program expired at the end of the fiscal year 2006. Last Congress, this Committee moved a targeted reauthorization of the Brownfields program through the committee process by voice vote. I am hopeful that we can repeat this action in the near future, and partner with the other Committees of jurisdiction in the House and Senate to move a straightforward reauthorization to the President's desk by the end of the year.

Madam Chairwoman, I look forward to working with you and our colleagues towards reauthorization, and communicating the message on the importance of full funding of the Brownfields program.

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