

**Statement of
The Honorable James L. Oberstar
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment
Hearing On
“Opportunities and Challenges in the Creation of
a Clean Water Trust Fund”
July 15, 2009**

Today’s hearing, again, focuses on the importance of increased investment in our nation’s infrastructure. Over the past year, this Committee has been leading the charge on the importance of infrastructure investment to the nation’s economy, to the quality of life of its citizenry, and to the prospect of continued prosperity for generations to come.

Whether through this Committee’s leadership to include infrastructure investment as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act or through our efforts to modernize and strengthen investment in water quality, aviation, or surface transportation programs, this Committee recognizes the fundamental importance of the nation’s infrastructure to current and future generations.

The importance of water-related infrastructure is magnified because of its impact on public health and the quality of the environment. This Committee’s tradition is to recommend robust funding for water-related infrastructure in fulfillment of our commitment to clean water for all Americans made more than three decades ago. Unfortunately, as is evident in the reports of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and others, the nation is falling behind in meeting this commitment.

First, there is clear evidence that much of the nation’s wastewater infrastructure is rapidly approaching, or has already exceeded, its projected useful life. Many cities and communities throughout the United States are currently facing a critical juncture in the age and reliability of their water infrastructure.

Second, according to EPA, many of the gains that have been made over the past three decades of water infrastructure investment are at risk because of a failure to keep pace with population growth and replace outdated or failing sewer systems. According to the agency, without increased investment in wastewater infrastructure, in less than a generation, the United States could lose much of the gain it has made in improving water quality as a result of the 1972 Clean Water Act.

I read in the written testimony for today’s hearing the statement that the current water-related infrastructure gap, “while significant...is hardly a crisis, and certainly does not justify some of the alarmist rhetoric ... about crumbling water systems.” I respectfully disagree.

We have all heard testimony on the enormity of the task of achieving the goals established in 1972 of fishable and swimmable waters. For example, EPA, the Congressional Budget Office, and others have projected that between \$300 and \$400 billion in capital investment is needed over the next 20 years for the restoration and replacement of the nation’s aging infrastructure.

In addition, we know that today, combined sewer overflows (CSOs) and sanitary sewer overflows (SSOs) discharge billions of gallons of raw or partially treated sewage per year. These sewer overflows cause significant environmental impacts, and are conclusively linked to human health impacts. In 2000, EPA estimated that the cost to communities of addressing CSOs as \$56.6 billion, and the cost of addressing SSOs as \$88.5 billion.

Finally, we know that, every day, approximately seven billion gallons of treated drinking water leaks from distribution pipes. Estimates show that several major U.S. cities lose more than half of their treated water before it ever is delivered to homes and businesses. This waste of resources cannot continue.

I am pleased that this Subcommittee, under the leadership of Chairwoman Johnson, is continuing the debate on how to increase the overall investment in our nation's water related infrastructure. I also applaud Congressman Blumenauer for taking the initiative on the creation of a Water Trust Fund that intends to create a long-term, sustainable, and budget-neutral revenue source for meeting our water infrastructure challenges.

This Committee has extensive experience in the benefits of infrastructure trust funds. Whether through the Highway Trust Fund, the Airport and Airway Trust Fund, the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund, or the Inland Waterways Trust Fund, our members understand the benefit to State and local governments of predictable, long-term financing for capital expenditures. I welcome the debate on the creation of a similar trust fund for addressing the nation's water-related infrastructure needs. In my opinion, the facts warrant increased expenditures for addressing our water and wastewater infrastructure needs.

This Congress has taken the first step through an appropriation of \$4 billion for wastewater infrastructure needs through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and an additional \$2.3 billion for the Clean Water State Revolving Funds in the House-passed Interior and the Environment appropriations bill for fiscal year 2010. This is a significant reversal of the policies of the last administration that seemed to think that we could simply wish our infrastructure problems away. That policy has been proven wrong, and all we did over the previous eight years was to lose ground on maintaining and improving the condition of our infrastructure.

The next step is to continue this renewed commitment to meeting our wastewater infrastructure needs, and the creation of a clean water trust fund should be considered as a potential solution.

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