

Statement of Radhika Fox
Nominee for the Position of Assistant Administrator for the Office of Water in the
United States Environmental Protection Agency
Before the
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate

May 12, 2021

Thank you, Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Capito, and Members of the Committee. I am honored to appear before you this morning.

I am humbled to be nominated by President Biden, and considered by this esteemed committee, for the position of Assistant Administrator for Water at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. I am excited to engage with you, hear about your water priorities, and discuss how the Office of Water can support the communities that you proudly represent.

I want to acknowledge my family here with me today: my husband Jamie, my dad, my brother Raghu, and his wife, Katie. My kids Anjali and Krishna wanted to be here – but I said no skipping school! My family is the American dream at work. I am first generation American—my father and mother grew up in rural India, and my grandparents provided for their families as small farmers growing coconuts, rice, and mangos. My parents grew up without electricity. They relied on wells for drinking water and pit latrines for wastewater management. Everything I have accomplished is because I stand on the shoulders of my parents’ hard work. Today, I sit before you as the first woman of color, the first person of Asian American descent, to be nominated to lead EPA’s Office of Water. Only in America could this happen in one generation. If confirmed, it would be an honor to serve the country where my parents’ hopes and dreams could take root and flourish.

Senators, you all know that water is vital to life and to our communities. However, our nation's water systems are invisible to most. The vast majority of Americans turn on the tap and safe water flows out. Used water goes down the drain and is treated before being safely returned to the environment. Most people don't think about the canon of environmental policies, funding and financing programs, the work of local water utilities, and the key role of states and tribes in providing essential water services. It just works—for most Americans, but not for all.

Unfortunately, the importance of water is too often surfaced through tragedy. During the Flint Water Crisis, Time Magazine told the story of 2-year-old Sincere Smith, featured on the cover with a full body rash from bathing in the water. What Sincere and his family went through should not be experienced by any child or parent in this country. This is what brings me to this work. If confirmed, I will dedicate myself to ensuring that all people—regardless of their income, zip code, or color of their skin—have access to clean and safe water.

Prior to joining EPA, I served as the Chief Executive Officer for the US Water Alliance, where I championed consensus-based progress on complex water issues. In this role, I worked with water leaders across the country—from rural hamlets to urban enclaves, from the American heartland to the coasts. I worked collaboratively to address the most salient water issues facing communities, including climate change, affordability, equity and environmental justice, governance, financing, and infrastructure. I met communities where they were to help craft solutions that worked for them.

My prior experience also includes working at the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, which is responsible for providing 24/7 water, wastewater, and municipal power services to 2.6 million Bay Area residents. There, I gained practical, real-world experience managing drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater services to ensure public health and community well-being. I experienced firsthand what it takes to comply with the range of regulations and guidance promulgated by the Office of Water. I also

experienced all the challenges that water utilities face in delivering reliable and affordable water services, whether it's capital and budget planning, water infrastructure project delivery, planning for drought and diversifying water supplies, or managing through crises like wildfires.

Throughout my career, I have been guided by one foundational principle—listen to all sides to find enduring solutions, rooted in common ground. If confirmed, I will manage the Office of Water in a manner that is grounded in the wisdom, voice, and lived experience of those impacted by our decisions. We can't make policy sitting behind a desk in Washington, DC. We must actively engage with all who are impacted by our decisions—water utilities, farmers and ranchers, community organizations, environmental organizations, states, tribes, local officials, and many others. By working together, we can forge more durable outcomes for all our communities.

This is water's moment—it can unite the country and help us address the compounding challenges of a global pandemic, economic recession longstanding racial inequities, and the climate crisis. Water is the great uniter. It brings us together—across society and across the aisle. If confirmed, I would be honored to work with Administrator Regan, and all of you, toward achieving durable water solutions that benefit people across this country.

I look forward to your questions. Thank you.