

OPENING STATEMENT
EPW COMMITTEE HEARING ON NEW APPROACHES AND
INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGIES TO IMPROVE WATER SUPPLY
Wednesday April 20, 10am

Drought conditions have and still affect many regions of the country. California and Oklahoma have been dramatically affected. This morning we have witnesses which represent Orange County, California, promising new technologies in desalination, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

For the vast majority of the past 6 years, Oklahoma suffered from a devastating drought event. As the drought reached its worst in the summer of 2014, more than 60 percent of Oklahoma was in the U.S. Drought Monitor's "extreme" category. More than 30 percent of the state's land area was experiencing "exceptional" drought, the worst category. Communities were rationing water. Some communities in the hardest hit areas looked to reuse of wastewater and tapping unconventional sources or those of marginal quality for non-potable uses in order to free up more valuable fresh water supplies. Evaporating lakes and ponds in Oklahoma forced cattlemen to sell their herds and oil companies to search for increasingly expensive alternatives to continue production.

Abundant rainfall to excessive flooding conditions occurred nearly a year ago which caused dangerous situations throughout Oklahoma but greatly improved our water supply, at least for the time being.

Our water supplies are also over-taxed with old and often failing infrastructure not able to keep pace with demand. These problems affect communities all across the nation. It is not exaggerated to say that water supply issues limit growth and pose a very real threat to local and regional economies and people's quality of life.

However, in Oklahoma, communities have started planning with business groups, agricultural interests, and the energy sector on a local level to develop regional Water Action Plans to resolve their mutual water problems. The foundation of the Water Action Plan model demonstrates that water as the key element in state and local economies. It focuses on unifying and forcing stakeholders to develop near-, short- and long-term regional strategies to maximize reliability and diversify the supply of water.

The severe drought conditions Oklahoma encountered forced us to identify new sources of groundwater and further develop our existing underground supplies to address our over-reliance on surface water, build new infrastructure and pipelines to reliable and underused water sources, building new wells, improving and refurbishing existing reservoirs, and changing water use ordinances to encourage or require more water conservation.

City planning and regional planning has been the most efficient way of preparing and addressing water supply problems, but there are supportive roles for state and the federal government to assist our communities and there are roles for our corporate citizens as well.

For example, one area in Oklahoma hardest hit by drought is the city of Enid, Oklahoma. One innovative example by the Koch Industries' nitrogen facility, one of the largest fertilizer production plants in North America, uses the City of Enid's treated wastewater for in-plant cooling water. Eventually, this reuse project will free up almost five million gallons of water each day—that's almost one-half of Enid's total current usage.

The federal government can have a role to play in assisting in regional infrastructure planning among states. An example of that are the chloride control actions at the Red River between Oklahoma and Texas. These projects were specifically authorized by Congress dating back to 1966 with chloride control studies beginning at the Red River as early as 1959. Chloride control actions in Oklahoma and Texas has and will provide new drinking water supplies, increased agricultural irrigation, and improved downstream water quality. In fact, Mr. Dalton, I am currently working with Corps' Tulsa District Office to develop a general reevaluation review and record of decision for the Elm Fork Chloride Control Plan in Oklahoma.

At one point, some reservoirs in Oklahoma were less than 20 percent capacity. Now, many are nearly full with multiple years supply. Although presently, the drought has subsided, plans must continue so our communities are prepared for both uncertainties but for growth as well. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses this morning and new opportunities.