A Bipartisan Path to Improving America's Water Infrastructure

The Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Act

From the lead contamination crisis in Flint, Michigan to the water outages in Texas after winter storms this year, the American people have directly seen and experienced the consequences of our outdated water infrastructure. Millions of Americans do not have consistent access to clean drinking water. Many more live in areas where a single storm or natural disaster could devastate weak and archaic infrastructure, leading to an outright catastrophe.

Congress must invest in water infrastructure to help families in need and deliver clean water to every zip code.

The bipartisan *Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Act of 2021* (DWWIA 2021, S. 914) will strengthen drinking water and wastewater infrastructure, foster economic growth, enhance the health and well-being of families across the nation, and address environmental justice.

DWWIA 2021 makes significant investments in Environmental Protection Agency grant programs and revolving loan funds that support our nation's water infrastructure. This bill will authorize the investment of more than $35 billion in water infrastructure projects across the country that focus on upgrading our aging infrastructure, addressing the threat of climate change, investing in new technologies, and providing assistance for marginalized communities.

The bill includes nearly $30 billion in funding for the Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund (CWSRF) and the Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund (DWSRF) and an additional $6 billion in grant funding. This legislation:

- **Prioritizes environmental justice through targeted grant programs and technical assistance for small, disadvantaged, rural, and tribal communities.**
- **Empowers states with increased funding and program flexibilities to invest in community water projects that address aging infrastructure and improve water quality.**

- **Increases investments in lead abatement through grant programs and technical assistance.**
- **Authorizes funding to connect households to public drinking water and wastewater services, install decentralized wastewater systems, and improve sanitation in Alaskan rural and native villages.**
- **Supports climate-resilient water projects to address the worsening impacts of climate change on drinking water and wastewater infrastructure.**
- **Invests in the drinking water and wastewater needs of tribal communities.**
- **Fosters the development and deployment of emerging technologies that result in cleaner, safer, and more reliable water.**

Specifically, the bipartisan *Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Act of 2021* will:

Invest in Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure
States need serious investments from the federal government to modernize and maintain their water infrastructure. DWWIA 2021 reauthorizes the Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund (CWSRF) at increased levels for the first time since 1987, growing the program to $3.25 billion annually over five years for a total reauthorization of $14.65 billion. It also codifies an existing 10 percent state set aside that provides additional assistance to disadvantaged communities. States are allowed to spend up to 30 percent of their total allocation on these communities.

The Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund (DWSRF), which expires at the end of 2021, is also reauthorized, and for the first time receives equal funding to the CWSRF. This $14.65 billion reauthorization will provide critical resources to states to upgrade aging infrastructure and address water quality to provide clean, safe water to more Americans. DWWIA 2021 also increases the minimum set aside states must use to provide additional subsidies to disadvantaged communities from six percent to 12 percent. States are allowed to use up to 35 percent of their total allocation on these communities.

Improve Access to Safe Drinking Water for Environmental Justice Communities
Far too many Americans, especially low-income communities and communities of color, do not have reliable access to safe and clean water. DWWIA 2021 promotes access to clean drinking water and improves water quality monitoring in communities across the country. More than 40 percent of the total authorizations are intended to benefit small, rural, disadvantaged, and tribal communities.

The bill increases funding for the existing Assistance for Small and Disadvantaged Communities grant program and creates an additional competitive grant program for states based on the prevalence of underserved communities. This bill also includes a needs assessment on the prevalence of low-income households that spend a disproportionate amount of income on public drinking water services. Based on that assessment, it creates a pilot grant program to assist low-income households with maintaining access to affordable drinking water and wastewater treatment. This bill also has a requires anaylsis by EPA on the historical distribution of funds to low-income, rural, and minority communities and indigenous peoples in order to improve the distribution of these funds.

The bill also makes several updates to existing programs and establishes new funding for programs to reduce lead in drinking water, authorized at $690 million. This bill increases the Lead Reduction Grant program to $100 million annually, increasing the Voluntary Lead Testing in Schools program to $50 milllion annually by 2026 and creates a new grant pogram for lead line replacement based on inventorying. This bill also reauthorizes a fund for a public water system facing a public health emergency, including an intrusion of lead into the drinking water supply and other funding options for filters and lead service line replacement.

Connect Households to Drinking Water and Wastewater Services
Many low-income communities and communities of color across the U.S. lack access to clean drinking water and basic sewage systems. DWWIA 2021 authorizes $550 million annually in new grant programs for nonprofit organizations and public treatment works to help eligible households connect to existing drinking water or wastewater infrastructure or install or upgrade decentralized wastewater systems. It also includes a $230 million reauthorization for grants to rural and Native villages in Alaska for the development and construction of public water systems and wastewater systems, which will improve the health and sanitation conditions of individuals living in those communities.

Help Communities Build Resiliency to Extreme Weather Events
Our nation's water infrastructure is increasingly vulnerable to extreme weather events. DWWIA 2021 provides a combined $500 million for water infrastructure resiliency and sustainability grant programs, which award grants to communities to increase the resiliency or adaptability of water systems to natural hazards, including extreme weather events due to climate change. The Drinking Water Infrastructure Resilience and Sustainability program for small and disadvantaged communities is reauthorized at $25 million annually—an investment more than five times larger than the previous authorization—and a new program for medium and large systems is authorized at $50 million annually.

DWWIA 2021 also creates a new Clean Water Infrastructure Resiliency and Sustainability Program, which for the first time will provide grants to communities of all sizes looking to fortify their wastewater systems from the impacts of climate change. This program is authorized at $25 million annually, for a total investment of $125 million.

Invest in the Water Infrastructure Needs of Tribal Communities
Tribal communities need robust federal investments in their water infrastructure. DWWIA 2021 increases the authorization of the Tribal Drinking Water Program to $50 million annually, for a total of $250 million. It also amends the program to designate that 50 percent of the funds be used by tribes nationally, while the other 50 percent of the funds must be used to fund 40 projects equally divided between the Missouri River Basin, Upper Rio Grande River Basin, the Columbia River Basin, and the Lower Colorado River Basin. It also amends the Lead Contamination in School Drinking Water grant program to make tribal consortia eligible grant recipients assist tribal education agencies in testing for lead contamination.

To improve and address the wastewater infrastructure needs of tribal communities, DWWIA 2021 allows states to reserve up to two percent of their CWSRF to provide technical assistance to small, rural, and tribal publically-owned treatment works. The bill also amends the Water Infrastructure and Workforce Investment grant program to require federal, state, and local governments to coordinate with tribal governments in the creation of water infrastructure workforce development programs.

Invest in New and Emerging Technology

Tackling pressing issues like climate change, pollution, and our aging infrastructure requires harnessing new technologies. DWWIA funds the development and deployment of new and existing technologies that reduce emissions, improve energy efficiency, increase coastal resiliency and improve the affordability of large and small water systems across the country. Specifically, the bill invests a total of $50 million in the deployment of drinking water infrastructure technology that is new or emerging, but proven, to enhance the treatment, monitoring, affordability, efficiency, and safety of drinking water in small and underserved communities.

It also establishes a grant program funded at $15 million annually for state and local governments in coastal areas with significant pollution levels or substantial wastewater infrastructure deficits to encourage information sharing among communities regarding water quality, water infrastructure needs, and water technology.

The bill also creates and authorizes $5 million annually for a grant program for research institutions and institutions of higher education to study new and emerging stormwater control technology. It also establishes an accompanying grant program, authorized at $10 million annually, to deploy that technology in carrying out stormwater control infrastructure projects. Finally, the bill creates a wastewater efficiency grant pilot program that provides $20 million annually to publically owned treatment works that wish to invest in technology or projects that improve waste-to-energy systems. The total investment in these programs is $300 million over five years.