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Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works

Oversight Hearing on Federal Drinking Water Programs

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Testimony of

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Good Morning, Chairman Boxer, Ranking Member Inhofe, and Members of the Committee. My name is Jeffrey K. Griffiths, and I am a public health and infectious diseases physician at Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston. Although I serve on the Science Advisory Board of the US EPA as the Chair of the Drinking Water Committee, I am speaking today for myself and not as an official representative of that body.

Recent press reports continue to identify water-related threats to public health. We supply water to children which contains copper and lead, arsenic, nitrates, and other toxic compounds. This is disgraceful. Our drinking water is contaminated with industrial chemicals such as perchlorate and MTBE, and agricultural chemicals such as nitrates and atrazine. We have, in my opinion, a flawed approach to these issues, and have also allowed lax enforcement of regulations. We have failed to protect vulnerable people, such as children, pregnant women, and the elderly.

Our process for identifying worrisome compounds is flawed and doomed to miss some truly risky chemicals. We test and regulate chemical contaminants chemical by chemical, rather than by using reasonable, prudent, common-sense approaches which would allow us to regulate groups of chemicals. We simply do not have the scientific capacity to test every individual chemical used in the United States. The US EPA has the resources to thoroughly examine only a relative handful of chemicals; yet hundreds to thousands of new chemicals are introduced into industrial production every year. In support of these statements allow me to reference a letter to the Honorable Lisa Jackson from the Science Advisory Board, dated January 29, 2009.[1]

Water ignores artificial political boundaries as it journeys from the sky to the sea. We artificially divide oversight of agricultural chemicals and animal wastes at the state and federal levels, we have a mess when it comes to these contaminants. The majority of fertilizers applied to croplands ends up in water. The true public health and economic cost to this contamination is shifted downstream. It makes the job of treating water for human consumption more difficult and more expensive. It is also destroying critical incubators for sealife and related commerce, such as the Chesapeake Bay. When the manure from our industrialized concentrated animal feedlot operations is applied to the land, we *will* contaminate the water some proportion of the time and

[1] Science Advisory Board Advisory on EPA's Draft Third Drinking Water Contaminant Candidate List (CCL 3), EPA-SAB-09-011

make some people sick. We must find a way to feed the public wholesome food without asking them to drink bad water.

The water crisis is not a rural phenomenon, it is a national phenomenon. Cities and towns are dealing with limited quantities of water. This is being exacerbated by new climate variability, with worsening drought in dry areas. Climate variability has also led to increasing flooding, which overwhelms combined sewer and overflow systems, so that sewage contaminates our drinking water. We all know it is bad to have poop in our water. Water delivery is at risk because of our aging infrastructure of pipes in the ground.

We have institutionalized an approach to testing for water contaminants that in my opinion will not protect the public unless it is changed. We test for contaminants infrequently and average exposures over the year, so that we are guaranteed to miss important seasonal spikes of contamination and give false reassurance to ourselves. Do we really want pregnant women, babies, and children to drink water with high levels of contaminants during periods of sensitivity? I think not.

In my opinion, we need a paradigm shift about water. We have to better protect our water from contamination, and we must better monitor our water. We must face the fact that we cannot test every potential chemical contaminant for safety, and must devise a more rational and comprehensive regulatory approach. We have to do a better job of keeping infectious pathogens out of our water, by stopping human sewage overflows and animal manure intrusions. We must hold our drinking water providers accountable for their lapses. We should, in turn, help our drinking water utilities to deal with these challenges in three ways: First, keep water from being contaminated in the first place so they have an easier and less expensive task when removing contaminants; second, help them to adopt modern treatment technologies that will remove a suite

of contaminants, and not just the currently identified bad actors; and third, value their work and value clean water through managerial, operational, and financial support. If we choose to do these things, we will be healthier and we will have spent less money in the long run, and acted as good stewards of this precious resource.

Thank you for your time. Madame Chairman, this concludes my remarks, and thank you for this opportunity to appear today.

Respectfully yours,



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