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**Opening Remarks by Congresswoman Betty McCollum
Meeting with City of New Brighton and U.S. Army
Funding of the New Brighton Contaminated Groundwater Recovery System
(NBCGRS)
March 4, 2014**

Good afternoon everyone.

Mayor Jacobsen, I would like to welcome you and your team from New Brighton to today's meeting. Thank you very much for being here.

Mr. Wolfe, I would also like to thank you and your colleagues representing the United States Army for meeting on a day that feels like we could be in Minnesota.

For the next three hours, I would like the representatives of the City of New Brighton and the Army to focus on what is possible and to focus on working towards an agreement to fund this essential and successful water treatment facility.

The families consuming New Brighton's water are my constituents, as they are yours, Mayor. Ensuring the health and safety of every New Brighton resident who is consuming this water is my priority, it's a priority for Sen. Klobuchar and Sen. Franken, as it is for the City and the Army.

On this we are all in agreement.

Those same New Brighton constituents are also local taxpayers and federal taxpayers. They deserve to have us all working for the most fiscally responsible outcome that protects the City from any potential financial risks, as well as protecting human health and safety.

We are here in the Library of Congress – the Jefferson Building – a very special place. We are not in the Supreme Court – that's down the street. As you all know, as Member of Congress I am a legislator, not a judge. Congress is a deliberative body of lawmakers, not a court of law. I want this meeting to be about moving forward towards an agreement.

So again, what I hope to see today from the Army and the City is a focus on what is possible, not on what is impossible. The City must be provided with the federal funds to operate the Contaminated Groundwater Recovery System, likely for generations to come. The Army must provide the City with those federal funds within the parameters of existing federal law set forth by Congress. We all know that the existing operational funds are running out, so getting to an agreement is essential.

We are here because of a unique situation and relationship. The 1988 litigation settlement agreement, the subsequent implementing agreements, the Army's clear responsibility for the contamination and the remedy, and the need for what could be perpetual water treatment makes this relationship unique. And Congress also has a clear stake in this matter.

The law that is the basis of the litigation settlement agreement – CERCLA – is a product of Congress. The Defense Environmental Restoration Program – is a product of Congress. The congressionally appropriated federal funds that have been used these past twenty-plus years and will be needed in the future to operate the Recovery System are also a product of Congress.

Clearly, pursuing congressional action through legislative language is an option to meet the future needs of both the City and the Army, if both parties are interested in cooperating. This is an option that should be explored today.

Another path forward is litigation. It is fully within the right of the City to pursue legal action. It would be my hope that an alternative solution could be found. Litigation would be very costly to taxpayers and there is no guarantee of an outcome better than one that could be achieved through negotiations.

As you all know, the LITSAG was signed in July of 1988. Twenty five years later, in July of 2013, my congressional office first encountered this issue and your relationship. So it goes without saying, you are the experts, not me. The people here today have the experience and the ability to ensure another twenty-five, fifty, or, if needed, one hundred years of safe drinking water for the families of New Brighton. My role today is to facilitate.

Again, thank you all for being here. I look forward to a respectful and productive discussion today that sets New Brighton and the Army on a path to a successful outcome.

Now, I'd like to ask the representatives of Senator Klobuchar and Senator Franken to make an opening statement.