

Testimony of Deanna White, State Director, Clean Water Action  
February 24, 2020

Representative McCollum, thank you for the invitation to be here today on behalf of Clean Water Actions more than 50,000 Minnesota members.

Water is our most precious resource. There is no life without water. It is the heartbeat of communities and commerce, it is where we find comfort and peace.

A government's budget is a clear sign of its priorities. The Trump administration's FY21 federal budget proposal is a disaster for our water. This administration is also dismantling federal protections, meaning that more and more responsibility will fall to the states like Minnesota at the same time they are cutting federal funding that would enable us to pick up the slack. President Trump is rolling back vital safeguards for clean water, including removing federal protection for streams and wetland with his Dirty Water Rule, rolling back the 2015 Clean Water Rule that protected drinking water sources for 1 in 3 Americans. He is taking away states', tribes' and communities' ability to weigh in on projects, by attacking Clean Water Act Section 401 and NEPA. And each year in office President Trump has proposed slashing funding for programs that improve infrastructure and protect communities' access to clean water.

President Trump has made no secret of the fact that he would prefer to eliminate the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) entirely. He's proposed huge cuts to the Agency's already small budget each year he's been in office. He put a coal lobbyist in charge. His budget proposal makes his intentions clear. The proposal goes after EPA with the largest cut to any department—a staggering \$2.4 billion, or 27% cut—from current levels to \$6.7 billion. This would bring its budget to the lowest total since the 1980s (adjusted for inflation) and would leave EPA with its smallest workforce in 30 years.

This proposed budget would be absolutely catastrophic for clean water -- it calls for \$780 million in new cuts to the largest source of federal dollars for water infrastructure, the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds. In all, the proposal slashes EPA funding for water programs and grants by more than \$1.3 billion.

- \$172 million in vital grants to states that help protect water from non-point source pollution, like agricultural and storm water runoff? Totally gone.

- Funding for states to help water systems deliver safe and reliable drinking water? Cut by \$38 million (a 36% reduction).

These cuts won't just mean that EPA is doing less to protect our water, they also hit state and local governments and drinking water systems hard. **States like Minnesota would lose out on federal funding, leaving taxpayers and ratepayers holding the bag.** In 2020, MN is receiving \$16 m for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund and \$29m for Clean Water SRF. President Trump wants to cut \$4m and 10m from each of those allocations, meaning that the state would need to come up \$14 million just to make up the cuts from these two programs.

Our drinking water systems were built with large investments from the federal government because we recognized as a society that our people deserve access to clean, safe, affordable drinking water. We invested in communities because we realized that for most, building the infrastructure required to provide drinking water was an impossible dream. Drinking water infrastructure is expensive, too expensive for small or low-income communities to tackle on their own. However, because small government advocates have been successful in their work, federal investments have decreased significantly and local

communities are left to their own devices to figure out how to afford these huge investments. In some communities, just the cost to keep up with pollution and attain safe drinking water standards is in the thousands of dollars per household. As a result, communities are forced to delay necessary expensive infrastructure investments.

We are falling behind for necessary investments in the water infrastructure to deliver safe and affordable drinking water and ensure water leaving our systems is not overwhelming systems downstream. Dangerously outdated storm water infrastructure remains a huge threat to our lakes, rivers, streams, and groundwater due to inflow and infiltration as well as sewer overflows that can happen when certain areas get more than an inch of rain and too much water enters the infrastructure system. From combined sewer overflows to old, lead service lines, our water infrastructure needs updating to protect water resources for future generations. We need to act now and invest in updating and replacing our crumbling water infrastructure.

The American Water Works Association (AWWA) estimates that it will take \$1 trillion to restore existing service and expand new service to meet the needs of a growing population over the next 25 years. In Minnesota alone, the figure tops \$11 billion for drinking water, wastewater and storm water, and \$7 billion for drinking and wastewater management. These numbers depict not only the scale of the problem, but the significant need to improve our deteriorating water infrastructure. Unfortunately, funding is lacking at all levels of government, which combined with political pressure to keep water rates artificially low has created a potential crisis for our water systems if something is not done to address the deficit.

So we urge you to:

- Reject Trump budget cuts

- Increase funding for EPA and other agencies/programs that protect the environment

The funding levels proposed in the House Democratic "Moving Forward Framework" show the kind of leadership we need when it comes to investing in our water. We strongly support the water investment levels envisioned in this plan such as:

- Increase funding for these specific water programs over the next 5 years:

  - \$40 billion over 5 years to the Clean Water SRF (currently \$1.6 B/yr - would quintuple)

  - \$5.6 B for Clean Water Act grants to states - non points source pollution, PFAS research and treatment, sewer overflows etc.

  - \$22.9 b for Drinking Water SRF (currently \$1.1 B/yr - would quadruple)

  - \$2.5 B in PFAS treatment

  - Regional programs like GLRI: over \$2 B (currently \$320 m/yr)

- Additionally, beyond the Moving Forward framework, there are several other water programs at EPA in need of additional resources:

  - Public Water System Supervision grants to states: Current \$106 m

    - MN received \$2.45 million in 2019. Increasing this would help more water systems in our state improve performance. Instead President Trump wants to cut this by 36%

  - Underground Injection Control program grants to states: Currently \$10 million

- Support at least \$350 million for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI)

Clean water is the foundation for healthy and prosperous communities, our predecessors recognized the importance of making significant, long term investments in water infrastructure – we must pick up their mantle and renew our commitment to public health, prosperity and clean water.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here. Thank you Representative McCollum for your continued leadership on protecting our water and our environment.