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Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce

Markup of H.R. 5320, the "Assistance, Quality, and Affordability Act of 2010" Subcommittee on Energy and Environment May 19, 2010

Today, the Subcommittee will consider the AQUA Act, H.R. 5320, the "Assistance, Quality, and Affordability Act of 2010." This legislation will work to ensure that public water systems deliver safe, affordable drinking water to the American people, while creating jobs and prioritizing financially sound investment in our water infrastructure.

The AQUA Act has strong support from stakeholders across the board: rural and metropolitan water systems, state drinking water administrators, civil engineers, labor unions, water technology researchers, and environmental groups.

These groups have been brought together by the urgency of needed investment in our water infrastructure, and a focus on projects that make long-term sense.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, our nation's drinking water systems require at least \$334 billion in investment over the next twenty years. Currently, we are not investing enough to even maintain the infrastructure we have, let alone improve and upgrade it.

Reauthorizing the drinking water state revolving fund is a critically important step in addressing this priority. Some may argue that now is not the time to even think about investing in our nation's drinking water infrastructure. However, the longer we wait, the more these projects will cost. We need to fund preventive projects – to replace pipes before they burst – and to put in place sustainable infrastructure. And because this is a revolving fund, near-term investments can grow the funds available for water infrastructure projects long into the future.

The drinking water state revolving fund has not been reauthorized since it was originally enacted in 1996. The AQUA Act would reauthorize it and increase its authorization levels. This legislation authorizes \$1.5 billion in 2011, and the authorization would grow each year until it reached \$6 billion in 2015.

But this legislation isn't only about helping communities across the country provide families with safe, affordable drinking water. It's also about jobs.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors has estimated that, for every million dollars spent on water infrastructure, 8.7 construction jobs are created. And each of those construction jobs creates almost 4 additional jobs. This means that if the \$1.5 billion authorized in this bill for 2011 is appropriated, it could create some 61,000 jobs.

I would like to thank Chairman Markey for working with me on this legislation to engage the interested stakeholders and agencies. I'd also like to commend Chairman Rush, who worked on the enforcement provisions, and Representative Eshoo who has worked hard to strengthen the definition of "lead-free."

I encourage my colleagues to support this legislation, to ensure safe and affordable drinking water for the American people, to cut our long term infrastructure costs, and to jumpstart jobs in our construction and manufacturing sectors.