

Water. Jobs. Justice.

The Case for the Water Affordability, Transparency, Equity and Reliability (WATER) Act

The WATER Act is the most comprehensive approach to improving our water systems and helping ensure that every person has access to safe and clean water in the United States. We need a major federal investment in our public water infrastructure to renovate our nation's old water pipes, stop sewage overflows, address water contamination and avert a looming water affordability crisis. The WATER Act will simultaneously deliver water justice to the millions of people in the United States who lack access to safe water, while creating nearly a million jobs.

The WATER Act would provide \$35 billion a year to drinking water and wastewater improvements. Most of the water pipes under our streets were built at least a half-century ago in the years immediately following World War II.¹ This infrastructure is wearing out, and many water pipes have already reached the end of their usefulness.² Every year, there are 240,000 water main breaks, wasting more than 2 trillion gallons of drinking water,³ while billions of gallons of untreated wastewater spill into waterways.⁴ In total, our drinking water and wastewater systems need at least \$744 billion over the next 20 years, or more than \$35 billion a year.⁵

The WATER Act would create a water trust fund. The WATER Act would roll back a small portion of the Trump administration's corporate tax cuts by increasing the corporate income tax rate by 3.5 percentage points. It would dedicate \$35 billion each year to grant programs and to the Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) programs. Since peaking in 1977, federal funding for water infrastructure has been cut by 74 percent in real dollars. On a per capita basis, this is an 82 percent drop. In 1977, the federal government spent \$76.27 per person (in 2014 dollars) on water infrastructure, but by 2014 that support had fallen to \$13.68 per person.⁶ The WATER Act would help restore the federal government's commitment to safe water and safeguard this support from annual congressional appropriations battles.



The WATER Act would create up to nearly 1 million jobs and protect American workers. The WATER Act would create an estimated 700,000 to 945,000 jobs across the economy.⁷ It also requires the use of U.S.-made iron and steel, applies prevailing wage law to all projects and encourages union labor. The bill would limit drinking water funding to publicly run water systems and small locally owned systems to ensure that all federal dollars go to the public benefit and not to for-profit water corporations.

The WATER Act would help small, rural and Indigenous communities. It provides funding for technical assistance to help rural and small municipalities and Native American communities improve their water and wastewater systems. It creates a new grant program for residential septic tanks and drainage fields, and it dramatically expands funding to upgrade and install rural household drinking water wells. It also dedicates 3 percent of Drinking Water SRF funding as grants to Indigenous Nations.

The WATER Act would help address water contamination from per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFASs). It would provide funding to update treatment systems or find alternative water supplies when community water systems or household water wells are contaminated with PFOA, PFOS and other PFASs, which are widespread, persistent toxins.⁸

The WATER Act would help get the lead out of drinking water at home and school. It would expand a grant program to replace all lead piping and plumbing in public schools, and it provides grants to homeowners to replace lead service lines on their property. Nationwide, over 6 million lead service lines deliver water to millions of peo-

ple.⁹ Replacing these pipes could cost up to \$30 billion.¹⁰ For a household, it can cost more than \$2,000 to replace their service line.¹¹

The WATER Act would promote affordable water service for all. It would require that no less than half of SRF funding be given as grants and additional subsidization to disadvantaged communities. It would also help prevent water shutoffs by requiring the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to produce guidance about promoting universal access to safe water and to coordinate a study about water affordability and shutoffs, discrimination and civil rights violations by water providers, and public participation in water regionalization efforts.

Support the WATER Act. Other measures to address our water infrastructure challenges that incentivize the takeover of municipal water systems by for-profit entities are not the answer. We must restore our nation's confidence in its water, and that starts with restoring federal funding to local water systems. That is the best option to help communities upgrade and maintain their water infrastructure, replace lead pipes, conserve water and ensure that everyone can afford and trust their water service.

Endnotes

- 1 American Water Works Association. "Buried No Longer: Confronting America's Water Infrastructure Challenge." 2012 at 4 and 14.
- 2 U.S. Government Accountability Office. Testimony Before the Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, U.S. House of Representatives. "Drinking Water. The District of Columbia and Communities Nationwide Face Serious Challenges in Their Efforts to Safeguard Water Supplies." Statement by John B. Stephenson, Director of Natural Resources and Environment. (GAO-08-687T.) April 15, 2008 at 10; American Water Works Association (2012) at 4 and 14.
- 3 American Society of Civil Engineers. "Drinking Water." *2017 Infrastructure Report Card*. March 2017 at 1.
- 4 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). "Report to Congress on Impacts and Control of Combined Sewer Overflows and Sanitary Sewer Overflows." (EPA 833-R-04-001.) August 2004 at ES-5; U.S. EPA. "Report to Congress: Combined Sewer Overflows Into the Great Lakes Basin." (EPA 833-R-16-006.) April 2016 at ES-3.
- 5 U.S. EPA. "Clean Watersheds Needs Survey 2012: Report to Congress." (EPA 830-R-15005.) January 2016 at 1; U.S. EPA. "Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey and Assessment: 6th Report to Congress." (EPA 816-K-17-002.) March 2018 at 9.
- 6 Food & Water Watch analysis of data from U.S. Congressional Budget Office. "Public Spending on Transportation and Water Infrastructure." (Pub. No. 49910). March 2015 at Supplemental Table W-8; U.S. Census Bureau. QuickFacts. United States. Population estimates, July 1, 2014 (V2014). Available at <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/00>. Accessed April 20, 2016; U.S. Census Bureau. "Historical National Population Estimates: July 1, 1900 to July 1, 1999." June 28, 2000. Available at <https://www.census.gov/population/estimates/nation/popclockest.txt>. Accessed April 20, 2016.
- 7 Food & Water Watch calculation based on Clean Water Council. "Sudden Impact. An Assessment of Short-Term Economic Impacts of Water and Wastewater Construction Projects in the United States." June 8, 2009 at 6 and 11.
- 8 For more information, see Food & Water Watch. "These Chemicals Are Forever: Water Contamination From PFOA, PFOS and other PFASs." February 2019.
- 9 Cornell, David A. et al. "National Survey of Lead Service Line Occurrence." *Journal - American Water Works Association*. Vol. 108, No. 4. April 2016 at E182 and E187.
- 10 American Water Works Association. [Press release]. "Lead service line analysis examines scope of challenge." March 10, 2016.
- 11 American Water Works Association. "Communicating About Lead Service Lines: A Guide for Water Systems Addressing Service Line Repair and Replacement." 2014 at 14.