

Opening Statement – Representative James Comer

Subcommittee on the Environment Hearing: Examining PFAS Chemicals and Their Risks” March 6, 2019

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you all for joining us today for the first hearing of the Subcommittee on the Environment.

I look forward to serving as Ranking Member of the Subcommittee in the 116th Congress. I hope to conduct oversight of our federal policies and programs within the Subcommittee’s jurisdiction to make sure our federal agencies are serving our constituents effectively and efficiently. I am eager to work together to implement common-sense, reasonable solutions to the challenges facing our country.

We need to ensure access to reliable and affordable sources of energy that have proven capable of meeting our country’s needs. Our federal policies must facilitate responsible use and development of our valuable natural resources. Our businesses back home need a regulatory climate that affords them an opportunity to succeed without unreasonable burdens and without being stifled by unnecessary costs.

I understand the importance of safeguarding our environment. And vested with my ranking membership role on this subcommittee, I look forward to examining federal policies that have impacted and will impact our nation’s important natural resources. In Kentucky’s 1st District, lakes and rivers and the fish and wildlife found throughout them are a crucial part of our recreational and tourism economy. Additionally, farmers and other contributors to Kentucky’s vibrant agriculture industry depend on access to clean soil and water. As a farmer myself, I understand firsthand the importance of ensuring clean soil and water for this livelihood which is absolutely critical to the well-being of our citizens, our food supply and many other industries. I look forward to hearing more about how our federal agencies are working together to protect our environment and public health.

Today, we have convened to learn more about a group of synthetic chemicals referred to as “PFAS.” As they are found in a number of consumer products and very persistent in the environment, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, or the “EPA”, most people have been exposed to PFAS in their lifetime.

While this is a very large group of chemicals, most attention has focused on two of the more widely studied chemicals in the PFAS family, PFOA and PFOS. These two chemicals are no longer manufactured in the United States. However, as they have been associated with certain adverse health effects, concerns about their presence in the environment and drinking water persist.

Last month, the EPA released its PFAS Action Plan. According to then-Acting Administrator Andrew Wheeler, this plan is “the most comprehensive cross-agency plan to address an emerging chemical of concern ever undertaken” by the agency. Today, we will learn more about this plan and the tools that the EPA currently has at its disposal to address PFAS

contamination. In particular, I hope we can take a look at how the EPA can work with communities and water systems where contamination may be present.

As firefighting foam used by the Department of Defense is another potential source for introducing PFOA and PFOS into the environment, I look forward to getting an update from the Department on their efforts to identify potentially contaminated sites, ensure clean drinking water on their installations, and work with surrounding communities concerned about the impact of the Department's activities on their drinking water and environment.

While the EPA's action plan outlines a number of ongoing long-term actions, and the Department of Defense previously indicated they have been working to support efforts to develop firefighting foams that do not contain PFOS or PFOA, our conversation needs to include a discussion of a current cleanup strategy and any remediation activities that should be taking place now.

Potential drinking water contamination is frightening for any community. As such, we need to learn more what the EPA is doing to effectively communicate with states and localities and provide information to the general public about these substances and which areas might be affected.

I thank all of our panelists for joining us today. I look forward to working with my colleagues Representatives Fitzpatrick and Kildee on this issue.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.