

Statement for the Record of

The American Society of Civil Engineers

on

The Nomination of Radhika Fox to be Assistant Administrator for
Water of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

United States Senate

Committee on Environment & Public Works

May 12, 2021

Introduction

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) appreciates the opportunity to submit our support for Radhika Fox as Assistant Administrator for Water at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Ms. Fox has more than 20 years of experience in the water industry, including as the CEO of the U.S. Water Alliance and in policy and government affairs for the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission. ASCE is confident that Ms. Fox's commitment to the public health and the environment will lead to a reinvigoration and reinvestment of our nation's drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure. As the former CEO of the U.S. Water Alliance, Ms. Fox has a unique perspective about the condition of our nation's water infrastructure, as well as an understanding of policies that can foster equity. Ms. Fox's ability to work with water stakeholders will make her a valuable asset to the EPA.

ASCE's 2021 Infrastructure Report Card and 2020 Economic Study, *The Economic Benefits of Investing in Water Infrastructure: How a Failure to Act Would Affect the U.S. Economy Recovery*

Infrastructure is the foundation that connects the nation's businesses, communities, and people, serves as the backbone to the U.S. economy, and is vital to the nation's public health and welfare. Every four years, ASCE publishes the *Infrastructure Report Card*, which grades the nation's 17 major infrastructure categories using a simple A to F school report card format. The Report Card examines the current infrastructure needs and conditions, assigning grades and making recommendations to raise them.

ASCE's 2021 *Infrastructure Report Card* rated the overall condition of the nation's infrastructure a cumulative grade of "D+" across seventeen categories, with an investment gap of \$2.2 trillion. The Report Card gave our nation's drinking water and wastewater grades of "C-" and "D+," respectively. For the first time, the Report Card graded our nation's stormwater infrastructure, and it debuted at a dismal grade of "D."

Additionally, ASCE's 2020 economic study, *The Economic Benefits of Investing in Water Infrastructure: How a Failure to Act Would Affect the U.S. Economy Recovery*, found that our nation's deteriorating infrastructure and growing investment deficit has a cascading effect on our nation's economy, impacting business productivity, gross domestic product (GDP), employment, personal income, and international competitiveness; in fact, our failure to act by 2039 carries an enormous economic cost to the tune of nearly \$10 trillion in lost GDP, which will result in a loss of more than 3 million jobs in 2039.

The economic consequences of our nation's infrastructure deficiencies also extend to families' disposable incomes, with each household in the U.S. losing \$3,300 each year through 2039; if left unaddressed, the loss will grow to an average of \$5,102 annually from 2020 to 2039. It is possible to close the infrastructure investment gap and avoid the economic consequences caused by this deficit, but it will require sustained and robust investments.

Investment Shortfalls Total Billions of Dollars

Well-maintained public drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure systems are critical for public health, strong businesses, and clean waters and aquifers. Yet despite increased efficiency methods and sustainable practices, there is a growing gap between the capital needed to maintain wastewater and drinking water infrastructure and the actual investments that are made. By 2039, the disparity between needed and anticipated funding for drinking water and wastewater systems will be \$81 billion. If these trends continue, the funding gap will only widen, resulting in leaking pipes, source water pollution, and increases in the cost of O&M.

More than 16,000 publicly owned wastewater treatment systems serve the majority of wastewater needs in the nation and are functioning, on average, at 81% of their design capacity, while 15% have reached or exceeded it. Meanwhile, there is a drinking water main break every two minutes in the nation and an estimated 6 billion gallons of treated water lost each day in the U.S. – enough to fill over 9,000 swimming pools. Additionally, there is a growing annual funding gap of \$8 billion just to comply with current stormwater regulations. America’s drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure provide a critical service, and it is crucial that sustained, significant, and strategic investments from all levels of government and the private sector are made to meet the growing demand.

Conclusion

As advocates of strategic, sustained investment in our nation’s infrastructure, ASCE believes that Ms. Fox will display strong leadership as Assistant Administrator of Water at the EPA, and we wholeheartedly support her nomination. Thank you for holding this hearing and for giving us the opportunity to show our support. We look forward to working with both Ms. Fox and the Committee on drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure solutions in 2021 and beyond.