Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Moran, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the Environmental Protection Agency’s technical assistance and training and source water protection initiatives that directly benefit rural America. My name is Shelley Roberts and I am the CEO of the Idaho Rural Water Association representing over 350 small and rural communities that have to comply with all EPA regulations. There is a similar Association in all states. Before I begin, I would like to thank you and your staff for all the support and guidance you have offered. We are grateful.

My purpose in appearing before you is to simply emphasize the importance of providing small drinking water systems’ training and technical assistance in complying with the ever-expanding requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act. Of the billions of dollars provided to EPA by this subcommittee each year, small, rural communities will tell you they see and feel the most benefit from the dollars provided to rural water programs. It’s simple. Small communities want to ensure quality drinking water. Local water supplies are operated by people who are locally elected and whose families drink the water every day. However, they need assistance in a form they can understand. Funding provided to rural water programs across the country and in Idaho allow for spending to be more results oriented, non-regulatory, less bureaucratic, more effective and less expensive.

Currently, 92 percent of the 50,000 community water systems in our nation serve populations of less than 10,000. We urge you to continue funding the training and technical assistance and source water protection initiatives at the authorized level of $15 million.

In Idaho we have nearly 2,000 EPA regulated drinking water systems of which only 20 of those serve populations over 10,000 people. That means 1,947 water systems in Idaho are serving small communities. There are similar comparisons in the other states. I have witnessed a direct correlation between this assistance and increased compliance and sustainable activities for the utilities in Idaho. EPA has also made similar findings across the country. In the long run, water systems that are maintained and properly managed actually save the community and federal government money.
The Federal government mandates operators to be certified and receive continuing education each year. The only place small communities can receive training necessary to comply is through state rural water associations. Last year Idaho Rural Water offered 38 training sessions throughout Idaho and had nearly 1,100 attendees. In your district alone, Mr. Chairman, we provided training to 318 water officials representing 115 different communities.

As our communities learned about the potential EPA funding cut, we had an immediate outcry of support from our members, community leaders and even other state and federal agencies. This stack of letters represents a small portion of communities that will be adversely impacted both financially and technically as a result of the loss of EPA funding in this fiscal year. Our phones are literally ringing non-stop with people trying to enroll for classes that are being closed due to space limitations.

One example of the on-site assistance Idaho Rural Water provided occurred in Hazelton in Southern Idaho. The Hazelton low-income housing facility has only 40 water connections and is typical of the over 10,000 communities assisted each year by state rural water associations. The Hazelton Housing Authority was struggling to find a licensed operator and approached rural water for help. Rural water provided one-on-one personal training to help someone at the housing authority pass the test so the small housing facility could continue to serve these families. There are many, many examples just like this where small communities turn to rural water to help when all other resources have been exhausted and communities are trying their best to remain in compliance with state and federal regulations.

We urge you to continue to fund this small part of EPA’s budget (1/2 percent) of their budget which benefits thousands of communities and millions of people that depend on it for safe drinking water.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Moran, are there any questions I may answer for you?