

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 9, 2016

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
BUDGET
HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS
HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Gina McCarthy
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Administrator McCarthy,

Rural residents of Door and Kewaunee Counties in Wisconsin are experiencing a crisis from groundwater contamination that has left a substantial portion of rural residents without access to safe drinking water. I write to request your immediate attention to this urgent public health issue and your assistance in making safe drinking water options available as soon as possible.

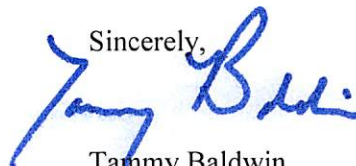
For months, residents have depended on bottled water due to the contamination of private wells by nitrates and bacteria. Nearly one third of tested wells contain these pollutants at levels that are above public health standards. The groundwater of Kewaunee and Door counties is a source of drinking water for thousands of rural residents whose primary drinking water source comes from their private wells. As ongoing testing provides updated information on contamination, more and more residents are facing difficult questions about how to keep their families safe.

Discussions about the sources of this contamination and the steps necessary to restore healthy ground and surface waters are ongoing. Task force groups composed of local stakeholders and conducted with the participation of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Agency are moving towards finalizing recommendations this spring. Concerned local citizens are addressing this issue in these task force groups and other forums, and their commitment to working together towards solutions is commendable. However, as these important conversations continue to unfold, residents remain without immediate solutions to the pressing need for safe drinking water.

A drinking water crisis that continues to compromise the health of residents necessitates an emergency response that addresses the immediate need for drinking water until longer term solutions are negotiated. EPA and USDA have resources and programs that can help the situation, including technical assistance and support under USDA's Individual Household Water Well Program and Emergency Community Water Assistance Grants Program. Specifically, I urge you to work with local communities to provide assistance with basic water needs, such as support with water testing, the installation of in-home water filtration systems, the distribution of bottled drinking water or portable water filters, and construction of temporary clean water systems that could provide a centralized source of safe drinking water that rural residents could access near their homes.

Thank you in advance for your attention to the urgent needs of Wisconsin residents of Door and Kewaunee counties.

Sincerely,



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator