

Written by Kathy

Monday, 13 March 2023 00:16 - Last Updated Wednesday, 15 March 2023 07:53



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By Kathy Wray Coleman, associate publisher, editor-in-chief

WASHINGTON, D.C- Ohio 13th Congressional District Congresswoman Emilia Strong Sykes (OH-13), an Akron, Ohio Democrat and member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment who was elected to Congress during the November midterm elections, recently introduced an amendment to H.R. 1152, a bill that would limit states' authority to review and approve federal projects that might harm a community's water quality.

It comes behind two high profile train derailments by Norfolk Southern in Ohio over the past month or so, the first on Feb 3 in East Palestine that caused a chemical explosion that drew activist Erin Brockovich, former president Donald Trump, and prominent Ohio Republican politicians like Gov. Mike DeWine and U.S. Sen J.D. Vance to the village of some 4,700 residents. Vance and U.S. Sen Sherrod Brown, a Cleveland Democrat and seasoned member of Congress, are also urging passage by Congress of the bipartisan rail safety bill the pair introduced. President Joe Biden has also been vocal on the issue and has pledged that he too will visit East Palestine at one point or another.

Rep. Sykes' amendment would restore some of a state's ability to protect its drinking water.

"No American should have to worry about whether their drinking water is safe when they turn on the tap water," said Rep. Sykes. "I've visited East Palestine twice in the last two weeks to assess the long-term impact of the Norfolk Southern train derailment and subsequent chemical spill on our region's drinking water and the Ohio River."

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The Congresswoman went on to say that "I've spoken to residents worried about the safety of their drinking water— residents who are asking lawmakers of both parties to take action to ensure this tragedy doesn't happen again. H.R. 1152, which would make it more difficult for local governments to review actions impacting water quality, is not what the people of East Palestine asked us to do."

Other members of Congress are on board in supporting H.R.1152.

"Protecting clean water is critical to public health and the environment, and enables businesses who rely on clean water to thrive," said Rep. Rick Larsen, a Democrat representing Washington's second congressional district. "I applaud Rep. Sykes' work to ensure communities have access to clean, safe water, and that states have the power to maintain high water quality standards."

If H.R. 1152 is enacted, the legislation would require states like Ohio and other states to take precautions relative to infrastructure projects and to take into account the potential for a pipeline to leak dangerous chemicals into the groundwater, as well as pollution factors and toxic runoffs.

The congresswoman also has support for her clean water bill amendment from regular Ohio citizens who want clean water and a safe and clean environment for their communities too.

"Congresswoman Sykes is eminently qualified to lead this, having earned a graduate degree in public health in addition to her law degree," said Richard Dick Perry of Shaker Hts, Ohio, who is a retired Cleveland Plain Dealer Newspaper reporter and a community activist.

In spite of some evacuations and fears from residents, the Environmental Protection Agency claims that the East Palestine train derailment that occurred on Feb 3 poses no serious harm to the community. Others, like activist Erin Brockovich, disagreed, Brockovich saying to reporters after visiting East Palestine earlier this month "clean water my ass."

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