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Guest Opinion: It's time to set a nationwide drinking water standard for PFCs

By Brendan Boyle

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For the five years that I have been in Congress, one of the issues on which I have spent the most time is water contamination.

We have a basic human right to safe drinking water. It is even a protected right in our state Constitution. But locally and nationally that right is being violated.

There are at least 20 separate sites in Pennsylvania alone contaminated with PFAS chemicals, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. For years, many people in those areas, including Horsham, Willow Grove and Warminster knowingly drank water with high levels of PFOA and PFOS.

We are not alone in Pennsylvania. States such as Michigan, New York, Massachusetts, and Ohio and many others are also grappling with PFAS contamination. Experts estimate that as many as 110 million Americans may be exposed to PFAS chemicals in their drinking water.

Back in January, I joined with a bipartisan group of colleagues, including U.S. Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-1) and U.S. Rep. Madeleine Dean (D-4) from our area, to form the Congressional PFAS Task Force. It is comprised of both Republicans and Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives who represent districts currently dealing with the public health threat of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances. The end goal being to better protect those communities from the harmful effects of these dangerous chemicals.

This is something you don't often see on your television set or read about on your Facebook feed when it comes to Congress — members from both sides of the aisle agreeing on an issue and working together to solve it. We all agree that

partisan differences have no place when it comes to addressing the safety of the water coming out of our taps and into our homes.

Governor Wolf's recent decision to allocate \$3.8 million to address the costs of PFAS water contamination is surely welcome news in our area. But the reality is it's a mere drop in the bucket compared to meeting the scale of the problem.

Both locally and nationally, the Defense Department must finally live up to its responsibility to pay to clean up the mess it caused. Further, the company that created the PFAS-filled firefighting foam must also pay for the harm it has caused.

We also must set enforceable, nationwide primary drinking water standards for PFCs including PFOS and PFOA. My legislation, H.R. 2377, the Protecting Drinking Water from PFAS Act, would do this. The bill requires the Environmental Protection Agency to address the level of PFAS in drinking water, and set enforceable standards that will keep us safe from these dangerous chemicals. The true extent of contamination nationwide is unknown because requirements for testing and monitoring nationwide currently don't exist.

Could one imagine children attending school but never having any supervision in the classroom? If this is unacceptable for our education system, why is it acceptable when it comes to the safety of our drinking water?

Congress can, and must, finally take water seriously as a public health issue.

Brendan Boyle, a Democrat, represents PA's 2nd District, which includes Northeast Philadelphia and parts of North Philadelphia.