***Press Release of House Energy & Commerce Committee***

**Subcommittee Examines, Advances Latta Drinking Water Protection Act**

**February 5, 2015**

WASHINGTON, DC –The Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy, chaired by Rep. John Shimkus (R-IL), today held a hearing to review H.R. 212, the Drinking Water Protection Act. Energy and Commerce Committee member Rep. Bob Latta (R-OH) introduced the bipartisan legislation following last summer’s water emergency in Toledo, Ohio caused by the increased presence of harmful algal blooms in Lake Erie. Following today’s hearing, the subcommittee voted to advance the bipartisan legislation by voice vote. H.R. 212 would require the Environmental Protection Agency to develop and submit a strategic plan to Congress within 90 days of enactment for assessing and managing the risk associated with harmful algal toxins in drinking water.

“Some folks may be tempted to think there are easy solutions to this problem, but from our hearing this past November, we learned we have a long way to go to understand it. The diversity of algae and their habitats only complicate the problem. The legislation we are reviewing moves in the right direction,” said Shimkus.

Dr. Peter Grevatt, Director Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water at EPA, explained the growing threat of algal blooms and described EPA’s current efforts to address this problem. He stated that harmful algal blooms “have become an increasing problem that can affect communities all across the country. Coordinated federal, state and local actions must continue to protect the nation’s drinking water supplies. The EPA is taking aggressive action to develop and publish health advisories, water quality criteria, and analytical methods while providing ongoing technical assistance to states and communities.”

H.R. 212 would also build on EPA’s efforts and enhance collaboration among federal agencies and the states to tackle this public health problem.  “Ensuring the health of our drinking water is paramount, and requires a thoughtful, robust approach,” said Latta. “The Drinking Water Protection Act creates a strategic plan to assess and manage the risks associated with algal toxins in our drinking water. Coupled with Dr. Grevatt’s confirmation today that the EPA is on track to release its health advisory in late spring, this legislation would establish the tools needed to respond to threats to our drinking water in a timely manner. I thank the subcommittee for advancing this legislation and look forward to working with my colleagues to get this bill signed into law.”

Mike Baker with the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency said, “The bill’s emphasis on a strategic plan is well placed. It’s become abundantly clear, to those who have wrestled with this issue, that the steps involved in protecting the public from HABs in drinking water are very much part of an interconnected puzzle. … The problem needs to be attacked holistically and thoughtfully, rather than piecemeal.”

Kristy Meyers, testifying for the Ohio Environmental Council, expressed, “We must address this problem for the health and safety of our children and grandchildren and this bill will help ensure safe guards are in place to protect our families and future generations.

Full committee Chairman Fred Upton added (R-MI), “As someone who represents a big chunk of Michigan coastline, I have long been a champion of all issues related to our Great Lakes and protecting those who live around them. This bill will give the EPA the tools they need to prevent future occurrences like the one that happened in Ohio.”