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**Testimony before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental
Affairs Subcommittee on Federal Spending Oversight and
Emergency Management**

“The Federal Role in the Toxic PFAS Chemical Crisis”
September 26, 2018

Good afternoon Chairman Paul, Ranking Member Peters, and honorable members of the Subcommittee. My name is Arnold Leriche and I am a retired environmental engineer from the EPA and a Vietnam era veteran.

I retired to Oscoda, Michigan mostly because I wanted to go fishing on the Au Sable River, the many beautiful inland lakes, and Lake Huron.

One thing I quickly learned after moving to Oscoda, is that many people fill their freezers with the fish they catch and the wildlife they hunt. It's second nature to the residents of Northern Michigan.

Oscoda sits next to the former Wurthsmith Air Force Base on the banks of the Au Sable River and the shores of Lake Huron. The Air Force used firefighting foam at a training site on base. That training site is adjacent to Clark's Marsh, a beautiful wetland.

For more than 25 years PFAS contamination drained into Clark's Marsh and from that marsh into the rivers and lakes of Northern Michigan. The base closed in 1993, but it wasn't until 2010 that our state environmental department started to investigate the site for potential PFAS contamination.

I learned from news reports in 2012 that they had discovered fish in Clark's Marsh with the highest levels of PFAS contamination found anywhere in the world. Then they found very high levels of contamination in the adjacent Au Sable River. I learned then of the health effects of PFAS contamination. We were advised not to eat the fish. You can imagine how that feels to residents of Oscoda who have spent their lives eating that fish and serving it to their children.

We now know that the contamination is in the groundwater and the drinking water. And it's even spreading into Lake Huron, which is a source of drinking water for hundreds of thousands of Michiganders.

I participated in sampling the drinking water around Van Etten Lake which adjoins the base. I will never forget the lake resident who asked, "How long has the contamination been in my well?" I could see the fear in her eyes as she thought about her grandchildren who had been drinking that water for twenty years.

The Air Force owned a beach on Van Etten Lake, which has been given to the township. On this beach, our friends fish and have picnics, children play and learn to swim. At this beach, on most days, you will find a bright white foam washing up on shore. The EPA says that PFAS contamination in drinking water is safe up to 70 parts per trillion. In this foam, it is found at 165,000 parts per trillion.

Would you want your children and grandchildren playing in that water? Would you want them eating the fish?

The harm extends beyond the residents of Oscoda. We know that there was contamination in the drinking water on Wurthsmith when it was an active base. I have personally heard from veterans,

such as SSG Rick Thempto and Airman James Bussey, who are to this day suffering from health effects.

I appreciate that the Air Force has taken some steps to address the contamination at Wurtsmith. But our water is still poisoned and we still cannot eat what we catch. I listened to the testimony of the government witnesses. I am glad that DOD and EPA are beginning to acknowledge this problem and think about steps to help fix it.

But the people of Oscoda don't have any more time for delay or missteps. We need action now. We want the responsible parties and the federal government to take this seriously right now.

We need interim mitigation. They already have enough information to take remediation actions. For businesses on the former base, we need assistance with indemnification and insurance to secure employment and encourage development. We need assistance in providing municipal water to residents who cannot drink from their own wells.

I ask this Subcommittee, please do not forget about the people of Oscoda-Au Sable Townships, and those like us all around the country. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on their behalf, I look forward to your questions.