

Budzinski Secures Appointment of EPA Coordinator for Cahokia Heights Flooding and Sewage Crisis

by Philip Shelly

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WASHINGTON — Today, U.S. Representative Nikki Budzinski (IL-13) and U.S. Senators Tammy Duckworth and Dick Durbin announced that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has appointed a coordinator for Cahokia Heights and the Metro East to support progress on the flooding, sewage and drinking water crisis.

In August of 2022, Senators Tammy Duckworth and Dick Durbin announced millions of dollars in federal funding through Congressionally Directed Spending and expanded federal water infrastructure grants that could be used to address the crisis. In April of this year, Congresswoman Budzinski [secured a commitment that the EPA would appoint a coordinator](#) to leverage these funds with existing state and local efforts to bring much needed relief to the community. A video of Budzinski requesting and securing the commitment in an exchange with EPA Administrator Michael Regan can be found [here](#).

“For decades, residents of Cahokia Heights have suffered from repeated instances of stormwater and sewage flooding with no solution in sight. Today, I’m so pleased to announce that a coordinator has been appointed by the EPA to respond to this crisis with the urgency it deserves,” said Congresswoman Budzinski. “With a partner on the ground, we can maximize federal, state and local resources to make critical infrastructure upgrades that finally address these unacceptable environmental health and safety issues once and for all.”

“Every Illinoisan deserves access to safe, reliable water and should be able to live without worrying that their neighborhoods will overflow with dangerous raw sewage whenever there is a heavy rain. I’m thrilled EPA appointed a coordinator to help tackle the flooding and sewage crisis that has devastated Cahokia Heights for too long,” said Senator Duckworth. “I’m proud to have written the water and wastewater provisions of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law—which were targeted to help communities like Cahokia Heights around the country—and I’m pleased that a dedicated, local coordinator is now in place to build on this progress as well as provide the attention and compassion this situation demands, and that I have been pushing for. I’ll keep working with the leaders at EPA to ensure that we do everything we can to help this community that has dealt with decades of unbearable flooding issues.”

“Cahokia Heights has faced decades of economic disinvestment and infrastructure failures that today are exacerbated by the relentless impacts of the climate crisis and the increasingly erratic weather patterns that have intensified flooding across the region,” said Senator Dick Durbin. “Establishing a dedicated and coordinator position at EPA to work alongside this resilient community and local and state authorities to find long-overdue and lasting solutions for distressing sewage and stormwater overflows is the result of locals’ tireless advocacy and a reflection of Administrator Regan and Regional Administrator Shore’s commitment to environmental justice and being a partner in the journey towards relief and resolution.”

“I am pleased to join Congresswoman Budzinski, Senator Duckworth and Senator Durbin in announcing the selection of Beth Murphy as EPA’s coordinator for Cahokia Heights and surrounding communities. This new position fulfills a commitment made by Administrator Michael Regan and strengthens EPA’s long-standing engagement with

Metro East communities,” said EPA Region 5 Administrator Debra Shore. “Beth will be supported by an EPA team already working in the region to tackle water infrastructure challenges, air pollution, and other problems facing these overburdened communities.”

The inaugural coordinator is Beth Murphy. Murphy is a 20-year veteran of EPA who had previously been a supervisor in the Enforcement and Compliance Assurance Division, where she managed inspectors, case managers and program analysts responsible for investigating and enforcing the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Clean Water Act. Prior to that position, she spent 16 years in EPA’s Great Lakes National Program Office. Murphy received her Bachelor of Science in environmental science from North Carolina State University and her Master of Public Health in environmental public health from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Since 2019, Cahokia Heights residents have cited 91 documented instances of sewage coming out of government owned pipes and into their homes. Residents of Cahokia Heights, which is 95% African American, have been forced to suffer years of unsafe living conditions and undrinkable water. Many in the community are retirees who struggle to find money for repairs, and the federal, state and local response has been insufficient to address the health and safety concerns. EPA’s new Coordinator will focus on ensuring that funds are quickly and responsibly disbursed to the community and that agency responses across the federal, state and local level are aligned.

Since taking office, Congresswoman Budzinski has been dedicated to solving long-standing health and safety challenges in the Metro East region. In August, Budzinski hosted EPA officials in East St. Louis and Cahokia Heights to hear directly from residents about their health concerns related to air pollution and contaminated water.

Budzinski has since announced [\\$500,000 for air pollution monitoring through the United Congregations of Metro East](#) as well as [the opening of Illinois’ first Environmental Justice \(EJ\) Academy](#) which will be administered by the EPA and held at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's [EJ Academy](#) is a training program that will help local leaders cultivate skills to identify and address environmental challenges in their communities.