
Chairman Hal Rogers
House Committee on Appropriations
FY 2015 Budget Hearing
US Environmental Protection Agency
March 27, 2014 (9:30am)
Opening Statement As Prepared

Mr. Chairman, thank you for yielding. Administrator McCarthy, I appreciate you taking the time to be here today.

We have been rolling right along through hearings with the various agencies, and I look forward to getting all 12 of our bills passed through the floor by August. This return to regular order is critical to restoring our process here in the House. The work we were able to accomplish when we rolled up our sleeves and worked together to finish the FY14 omnibus package is a prime example of what we can do together. This Committee was able to provide every facet of the federal government with adequate, responsible funding, while continuing to reduce federal spending – totaling \$165 billion in cuts since fiscal year 2010. I am proud of that track record.

Since I have become Chairman, I unfortunately have found myself at odds with your agency many times. For years it seems that the EPA has worked hard to devise new regulations that are designed to eliminate jobs in Appalachia, and especially in my district in Kentucky. There has been a relentless attack from this administration on jobs in the coal industry. Some might have the misguided impression that these are just dirty jobs that our people can do without. Nothing is farther from the truth. The average wage for a coal miner in this country is over \$81,000. In Kentucky, the average wage is \$70,000 which is 75% more than the average wage of all private industry in the state. These are jobs that are critical to the local communities where these workers live. But even if you ignore the fact that the EPA has had a heavy hand in upending the livelihoods of some 8,000 families in Southern and Eastern Kentucky, energy is still the backbone of the United States economy. Without cheap, reliable energy, businesses that have come to the US will look elsewhere. The uncertainty driven by the bureaucratic overreach created by this War on Coal will inevitably raise energy costs, and push businesses overseas and more Americans onto unemployment lines and welfare rolls.

I was disappointed to read on Monday that the Supreme Court decided not to hear a case in which the EPA was retroactively denying permits that the Corps had already approved years before. All this does is continue the cycle of uncertainty that the coal industry feels, never knowing if another government bureaucrat is going to walk out of the woods to shut down a mine operation simply because he or she doesn't like coal. This comes on top of new proposals to shut down coal fired power plants by creating standards that the EPA knows are impossible to meet with commercially available technology. This shows how serious this President is about one campaign promise of 2008 - to bankrupt anyone who intends to build new coal fired power plants. That attitude underlies nearly all of the EPA's actions. Thanks to this Administration, mining permits have languished; new rules have made it almost impossible to mine coal; court decisions are summarily disregarded; and productive mines sit idle. It is time for bureaucrats to lay aside their personal animus toward this staple of the American economy and allow for the "all of the above" approach to energy to which the President has paid mere lip service.

That should include coal. And it is time for the Senate to step up and pass the bills to protect coal mining and energy jobs that the House has sent over to them.

I am also dismayed at this week's news that despite years of concerns expressed by this Committee, the EPA and the Corps of Engineers are working to create new rules that will place strict new standards on thousands of miles of streams in this country. These are streams which flow seasonally or after heavy rains. By creating this new definition, the Administration is again striking at Kentucky's economy and workforce, since every hollow and valley in my region has such a stream running through it. This means that no economic activity – no road construction, no coal mining – will occur without the say-so of a bureaucrat in Washington. And another layer of red tape will be added to the Gordian Knot that already has a stranglehold on our people since this Administration declared a war on coal.

These topics are paramount for our economy and the survival of central Appalachia. I look forward to hearing your testimony and learning how these initiatives are going to help promote job creation and economic development in this country. Thank you.

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