

**“Death by a Thousand Regulations:
The Biden Administration’s Campaign to Bury America in Red Tape”
Committee on Oversight and Accountability
Wednesday, June 14, 2023
Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)**

With the issuance of Executive Order 13771, a directive that required any federal agency to repeal two regulations for every new, singular rule, Trump made his political agenda to undercut agencies’ statutory authority and weaken safety regulations crystal clear. During his disastrous four years in office, the Trump Administration rolled back more than 100 environmental protections including those that required oil and gas companies to monitor and repair leaks at their facilities; blocked coal companies from dumping mining debris into local streams; and mandated braking system upgrades for “high hazard” trains hauling flammable liquids like oil and ethanol. What could go wrong?

Let me list just a few examples. After Trump weakened the methane monitoring and repairing regulation, effectively freeing oil and gas companies from the need to detect and repair methane leaks, his own Environment Protection Agency (EPA) predicted his decision would result in the release of 850,000 tons of planet-warming methane into the atmosphere through 2030.¹ Not only does methane result in severe crop loss, wildfires, extreme weather, and rising sea levels, but it also harms air quality, and results in an estimated 1 million premature deaths annually worldwide due to respiratory illnesses.² Trump’s disregard for the environment and public health is frightening and shameful.

Furthermore, Trump eased mining debris dumping regulation and allowed companies to dump toxic water laced with mercury, arsenic and other dangerous pollutants, directly linked to cancer, cardiovascular disease, and neurological disorders, into America’s waterways. While Trump fought to save utility companies an approximated \$140 million annually, 2.7 million people were forced to pay for this windfall by sacrificing their access to clean drinking water and uncontaminated fisheries.³ Trump postures himself as a populist, but his actions consistently display his eagerness to sacrifice public health to satiate company interests regardless of the consequences.

Most disastrously, Trump’s reversal of the rule to require braking system upgrades for “high hazard” trains hauling flammable liquids like oil and ethanol resulted in the negligent derailment of a Norfolk Southern train carrying 100,000 gallons of flammable gas in East Palestine, Ohio. The fire released inordinate amounts of carcinogens into the air, prompting the evacuation of thousands of residents. Harmful chemicals leaked into the waterways and land, killing more than 43,000 aquatic animals and contaminating the drinking water of communities that heavily depend on wells. And not even two months later, a second Norfolk Southern train derailed, this time in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. These incidents will not end without change.

While these examples are clear sins of commission, Trump’s failure to act in times of crisis display his sins of omission. Negligence in a time of crisis can be as morally reprehensible as committing

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/13/climate/trump-methane.html#:~:text=WASHINGTON%20%E2%80%94%20The%20Trump%20administration%20formally,the%20atmosphere%20than%20previously%20known.>

² <https://earth.stanford.edu/news/climate-and-health-impacts-natural-gas-stoves#:~:text=Methane%20also%20threatens%20air%20quality,worldwide%20due%20to%20respiratory%20illnesses.>

³ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/trump-administration-finalizes-coal-plant-pollution-rollback#:~:text=BILLINGS%2C%20Mont.,streams%2C%20lakes%20and%20underground%20aquifers.>

the act itself. During Trump's presidency, gun violence killed 58 people at a concert in Las Vegas; 25 people, including a pregnant woman, at a church in Texas; 17 people at a school in Parkland; 12 people at a country-western bar in California; 22 people at a Walmart in El Paso and 9 people at a bar in Dayton. And what did he do? Nothing. Instead, Trump reversed his support for red flag laws, proliferated access to downloadable guns, and repeatedly caved to the whims of the National Rifle Association, an organization that donated \$30 million in political contributions to his first Presidential campaign.

Furthermore, as tornadoes ripped across the country, hurricanes slammed into our coasts, and fires roared through residential neighborhoods, the former President chose to politicize the White House's disaster response. Instead of offering aid and assistance, Trump threatened to cut FEMA funds, transferred nearly \$10 million from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's budget to support Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and blamed the forest fires on "gross mismanagement," even though 60 percent of California forests are under federal management, and another two-thirds are under private control.

Finally, nothing more clearly illustrates Trump's dereliction of duty than his inadequate response to the coronavirus outbreak. His failure to stockpile protective gear for frontline workers, make accessible testing widely available, and declare the coronavirus pandemic as a national emergency exacerbated the already brewing economic destabilization and insurmountable pressures on our health care system. In the final year of Donald Trump's presidency, more than 450,000 Americans died from COVID-19, and resulted in a 1.13 year drop of life expectancy, the biggest decrease since World War II. Even worse, the U.S.'s COVID-19 mortality rate was 40 percent higher than the average of the other wealthy nations in the Group of Seven.⁴

In contrast, the Biden Administration has answered the call to serve the public and used its regulatory reasonability to promote public safety. In July 2021, the Departments of Transportation, Labor, and Health and Human Services finalized a rule to reduce the prevalence of surprise medical billing for people who experience medical emergencies. In April 2022, in response to deadly mass shootings across the country, the Department of Justice finalized a rule to ban businesses from selling untraceable "ghost" guns and kits that allow people to build guns without serial numbers. In March 2023, the EPA proposed a rule to set the first national standard for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), also known as "forever chemicals," in drinking water. Biden's Administration has effectively used the regulatory process to save lives.

My friends on the other side of the aisle are quick to offer criticism, and yet when it is their turn to lead, they abdicate all responsibility. Sitting in the seat of government demands actively participating with all parts of society and embracing the challenges and risks that come with it to implement meaningful change and reform. Instead, this committee has been used to level scathing criticisms of policies, which are often hold overs originating from the former leader of their own party while offering no solutions. I call upon my Republican colleagues to remember their oath of office and equitably serve all their constituents their office has the responsibility to represent.

⁴ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/trumps-policy-failures-have-exacted-a-heavy-toll-on-public-health1/>