

“Oversight of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency”
Committee on Oversight and Accountability
10:00 AM, Wednesday, July 10, 2024
Statement for the Record
Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)

The climate crisis is not a distant threat; it is here, now, and accelerating. The scientific consensus is clear: human activities, particularly the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation, are driving unprecedented changes in our climate. We are witnessing more frequent and severe weather events, rising sea levels, and drastic changes in ecosystems that jeopardize biodiversity. The consequences of inaction are dire, affecting every aspect of our lives from public health to economic stability and national security.

In my district, we have seen firsthand the impacts of climate change. Floods, heatwaves, and unpredictable weather patterns disrupt our communities and economy. The cost of inaction is staggering, not only in terms of financial loss but in human suffering and loss of life. This is why the climate crisis cannot wait. We must act decisively and swiftly to mitigate its effects and adapt to its realities.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has been at the forefront of our nation’s response to environmental challenges, since its creation in 1970 in response to growing concern over air and water pollution. Its role is more critical now than ever. The agency's evidence-based approach ensures that policies and regulations are grounded in the best available science, protecting both the environment and public health.

Under its current leadership, the EPA has implemented a series of smart, targeted initiatives aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Programs like the Clean Power Plan, stricter vehicle emission standards, and regulations on methane emissions from oil and gas operations are essential components of our national strategy to combat climate change. These initiatives not only reduce harmful emissions but also drive innovation in clean energy technologies, creating jobs and fostering economic growth.

The EPA’s efforts to address air and water pollution are vital for protecting public health. By enforcing the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act, the agency ensures that the air we breathe and the water we drink meet safety standards, reducing the incidence of respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular diseases, and other health issues linked to pollution.

Recently, the EPA issued a final rule lowering greenhouse gas emissions from power plants, targeting the largest emitters in the power sector. Projections estimate that this rule will prevent up to 1,200 premature deaths and more than 360,000 cases of asthma by 2035, and reduce carbon pollution by 1.38 billion metric tons through 2047. This rule would also require safe management of coal ash in previously unregulated disposal areas protecting groundwater from contamination.

As this committee has reported on, when we act on climate change and keep global warming below 2 degrees celsius, we achieve immediate and significant health benefits to the tune of trillions of dollars. Yet, time and again, Republicans have sided with polluters, prioritizing the profits of a few over the well-being of our communities and the health of our

planet. We cannot understate the harm caused by their efforts to roll back essential environmental protections.

In June 2024, the conservatives on the Supreme Court, in *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*, overturned the foundational legal principal of Chevron deference, which defers to federal agencies' interpretations of legislative language to implement laws. This decision will have profound impacts on our work to protect our environment for future generations. Paired with the extremist agenda from Congressional Republicans, polluters and bad actors will be more emboldened than ever to put profits over people and planet.

From attempts to weaken the Clean Power Plan to proposals that undermine vehicle emission standards, these actions have consistently favored corporate interests at the expense of environmental and public health. The short-sighted push to expand fossil fuel extraction disregards the long-term consequences of climate change and pollution, leaving future generations to bear the burden of their inaction.

It is imperative that we hold these actions to account and reaffirm our commitment to environmental stewardship. We must ensure that the EPA has the resources and authority it needs to fulfill its mission effectively. This includes robust funding, support for scientific research, and the enforcement of regulations designed to protect our air, water, and climate.

The EPA's evidence-based approach is a critical component of our strategy to mitigate and adapt to climate change while reducing pollution and safeguarding public health. Thanks to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act, the EPA under the Biden Harris administration has the leadership and the resources to combat climate change, fight for clean air and water quality, and remedy environmental injustice. We must resist efforts to undermine these protections and instead prioritize the well-being of our communities and our planet.