

House Oversight Committee, Environment Subcommittee

Statement for the Record

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Chair Rouda, Ranking Member Comer, Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share my story with you about why clean air protections matter to people like me and to all Americans.

One hot August day in the summer of 1993, I returned from a beach day with my six-month-old and two-and-a-half-year-old. This had been the first day I'd really been able to do the single mother thing, after a long battle to divorce my mentally unstable husband and move the children hours away to my parents' house. When I pulled into the driveway, my parents said a disheveled man had been breaking into our neighbors' houses asking for me.

Alarmed, I locked all the doors and shut the windows, and I brought the babies to their beds upstairs. When I came back downstairs to sit in the living room, I happened to position myself with my back to the window. That's when my husband held up his gun and shot me from outside. Three bullets blasted through the window. One pierced through my arm, the next in my rib, and the other in my lung and spleen. I heard one last blast as he shot himself in the mouth.

I had a fortunate recovery, but my lungs have never been the same since.

My lungs, they're like balloons. They open up, they contract, and when the air quality goes from good to bad, they feel like they're expanding inside a tight box. Because of being shot in the lung, the opening for me to be able to inhale is smaller, so it becomes nearly impossible to breathe at times when the air quality is compromised. I need clean air.

I've lived in Denver for the past nine years. I love this place, I love my home, but I have trouble breathing here all the time. Even mornings when the air quality is labeled as moderate, I have to carry around an oxygen bag when I go outside. So during the recent wildfires here and in California, which blazed more monstrously than ever before, I was trapped inside my home.

There's a reason these fires are becoming more frequent and more monstrous. It's the same reason Denver had it's warmest winter on record last year. It's the same reason the ozone lingers above the air in Colorado. It's human-made climate change, and it's not going to stop unless our leaders stop prioritizing polluters over people, and instead work to take climate action. I urge this Subcommittee to take leadership on this issue and slow the Trump administration's continued giveaways to polluters at the expense of people's health.

The Trump administration's EPA administrator, Andrew Wheeler, is a former coal lobbyist and former chief of staff to Washington's most prominent denialist of human-made climate change, Senator James Inhofe of Oklahoma (who has received more than \$2.1 million in fossil fuel donations over the course of his Senate career). Now, despite his duty to protect the environment, Wheeler is still in the pockets of polluters. His policies show it. In August 2018,

Wheeler released a plan to replace the Clean Power Plan with a policy that will bail out polluters at the expense of thousands of people's health. The replacement will drastically heighten pollution, causing up to 14,000 deaths and 15,000 new cases of upper respiratory problems like mine. I cannot breathe in the pollution we have now. How will I live if it gets any worse?

I honestly thought that Wheeler was going to be better than former EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, but the reality is, he's continuing Pruitt's charge to undermine the EPA regardless of the costs to people's health--favoring polluters over people. Just before Pruitt resigned, he proposed to roll back regulations on car tailpipe emissions, which would significantly worsen the air for people with respiratory issues and tosses out a critical effort in cutting climate pollution. The final version of that rule is likely to be released in the next few months by the Trump administration. The person whose job it is to protect my ability to breathe -- EPA Administrator Wheeler -- is suffocating me, and future generations, instead.

Without breathing, I can't live. The recovery I endured after my husband shot me was painful, but it made me inseparable from my two beautiful children. I want to live to see their weddings. I want to live to meet my grandchildren. I want to grow old in this state we all call home. I want my life to matter. Under EPA Administrator Wheeler, it doesn't. I deserve better. We all do. I thank this Subcommittee for allowing me to share my story, and I urge its members to protect the health and safety of all Americans.