

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Ranking Member Brett Guthrie

Critical Mission: Former Administrators Address the Direction of the EPA

June 11, 2019

Thank you, Chair DeGette, for holding this hearing to focus on the future of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Today's hearing is an important discussion for us to have in order to build on the important work that the Energy and Commerce Committee has done, especially in the last Congress. We held hearings focused on reducing carbon emissions, boosting renewable energy options including emissions-free nuclear power, modernizing our power generation, and empowering industry to lead the way through innovation.

Additionally, in the 115th Congress, this Committee led the legislative efforts on numerous bills, including the reauthorization of the Brownfields program, nuclear energy innovation and modernization, hydropower, and increasing compliance for drinking water infrastructure, which all passed the House and were signed into law. Further, there were additional bills that passed the House, including ozone standards, energy efficient government technology, advanced nuclear technology, new source performance standards, and nuclear waste policy, to name a few.

There are exciting new ideas in sight, like carbon capture technology. Carbon capture is a technology that can capture up to 90 percent of the carbon dioxide emissions that come from the use of fossil fuels in power generation and other industrial sources. This technology means that the carbon dioxide emissions do not even make it to the atmosphere to begin with. Since fossil fuels will be used to power our country for decades to come, the EPA should be working with its other federal, state, and local partners to help speed the way for innovative new technologies such as this.

I want to be clear—we all want clean air, clean water, and environmental protection; but those things do not have to be achieved at the expense of jobs, prosperity, and national security. We are ready and willing to continue to have serious, solutions-oriented discussions about how to address issues facing our public health and environment, such as climate change risks, through American innovation, rather than a massive takeover by the federal government.

In addition to this Committee evaluating ways for the U.S. to be leaders in the environmental protection space, today we will hear from both Members and the witnesses about concerns regarding the current direction of the EPA. While there may be a difference of opinion

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on how best to approach some of the issues facing the agency today, it is not out of a desire to have a polluted environment.

Let's not forget that EPA is nearly 50 years of age. It might be appropriate to think beyond the model of the last five decades to contemplate an agency poised to tackle the problems of today and tomorrow, not armed for those of yesterday. I think it is an important opportunity for this Committee to broadly examine structural and legal areas where Congress may need to provide the agency with clearer direction on its responsibilities. That is, after all, one of the main functions of Congressional oversight.

Additionally, I am expecting that we will hear concerns from the witnesses regarding changes to regulations and how the ebb and flow of regulations from administration to administration could have a negative impact on industry. I think that this highlights the importance of bipartisan policy solutions, consistently transparent administrative practice, and agency regulations that appropriately balance the goals of a regulation with the costs of implementation.

Finally, it is no secret that much of rural America views the EPA with distrust, and has for quite some time. Many Members of Congress have heard stories from their districts about family farmers and other small businesses attempting to comply with federal environmental regulations, and feeling that the EPA was not a helpful partner. I am particularly interested in learning more from our witnesses today about what can be done to earn back the trust of these communities. Ultimately, to truly succeed we need stronger local, state, federal, tribal, and private partnerships where we can team up and leverage all available resources to accomplish the goals of cleaner water, air, and soil.

I hope that we can have a thorough and honest discussion to inform the future of the EPA, its mission, and how we can best protect the environment. I thank our witnesses for being here today and sharing their perspectives given each of their experiences as former EPA Administrators and I yield back.