

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.

Critical Mission: Former Administrators Address the Direction of the EPA

June 11, 2019

Good morning. I am very pleased to welcome four former EPA Administrators who served four different Presidents to our hearing today. You are all uniquely qualified to share your opinions with us on President Trump's EPA and whether it is fulfilling the agency mission of protecting human health and the environment.

Thanks to your efforts and the actions of previous Administrations – both Republican and Democrat – our air and water is cleaner, and our land is better protected. And that is true not just here in the United States, but around the world, as other countries followed America's example of strong environmental leadership.

EPA's record of accomplishments over the years has shown that protecting the environment and public health is not only good policy, but also good for the economy.

This is a challenging moment in history. The United States must decide whether we are going to sit on the sidelines or do everything we can to combat climate change and a host of other environmental threats facing our planet.

You don't have to look too far to see the risks communities across America are facing. Historic floods threatening farms and cities in the Midwest. A permanent wildfire season that now regularly decimates vast amounts of land in the West, destroying homes and businesses. Rising oceans making coastal communities even more vulnerable to extreme weather events. And record high temperatures year-after-year, which can be deadly, particularly for vulnerable populations.

Governor Whitman and I saw firsthand the tragic devastation of Superstorm Sandy in New Jersey in 2012. I had never seen worse storm damage in our area in my lifetime. For many, the storm was a worst-case scenario: lives were lost, businesses and homes destroyed.

As Governor Whitman points out in her testimony, according to a recent report, 35 U.S. cities could be uninhabitable by the end of this century because of climate change, and nine of those cities are in New Jersey.

And, just a week ago, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported that the Earth's levels of carbon dioxide have now jumped to a record high.

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More than ever before, we need a strong EPA that can protect public health and the environment against today's many threats and help lead this effort on the international stage.

Unfortunately, we have seen over-and over again that the Trump Administration is failing to rise to this challenge. In the past two and a half years, we have seen our country abdicate our role as a global leader on meaningful climate action and ignore consensus science that humans are now a major driver of global warming.

We've seen the Trump EPA roll back common-sense limits on pollution from power plants, and attack protections which keep American families safe from mercury and other toxic pollution. The Trump Administration has also moved to weaken successful automobile efficiency standards—a decision that 17 of the world's largest automakers said last week threatens to cut their profits and produce “untenable” instability in the manufacturing sector. These actions seriously undermine our ability to reduce greenhouse gas pollution, making the climate crisis even worse.

We have also seen the Trump Administration propose extreme cuts to EPA's budget, which would eliminate key agency programs, cut money for states and tribes, and eviscerate the Agency's science apparatus.

And not only is the Trump EPA sidelining science, in some cases, it's purging it altogether.

As these events unfolded at EPA, in April, the Committee received a letter from seven former EPA Administrators, who served under Presidents of both parties as far back as President Nixon. The former Administrators – four of whom are with us this morning – urged oversight of EPA, offered to be a resource, and affirmed the vital bipartisan mission of the Agency.

During this Congress, the Committee has already conducted oversight on a range of key issues affecting EPA, including roll backs of key clean air and climate protections, continued attacks on science, lack of enforcement of environmental laws, failure to protect workers from chemical risks, and the impact of the Trump Administration's drastic proposed cuts to EPA's budget. And we now look forward to hearing from this distinguished bipartisan panel. The four former Administrators with us this morning truly know what is at stake and how to accomplish EPA's mission.

More than ever, our communities, families, and planet need a robust EPA that is fully committed to protecting human health and the environment.