

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Ranking Member Greg Walden

Critical Mission: Former Administrators Address the Direction of the EPA

June 11, 2019

Thank you, Chair DeGette, for convening this hearing with four former Administrators of the EPA. I welcome our witnesses and this conversation about the future and direction of the EPA.

Regardless of whether you are in government or not, we must always keep in mind that EPA's core mission, tasked by Congress in statute: clean air for Americans to breathe, safe water for our citizens to drink, and soils free from pollution.

Too often, people fall into the trap of assuming a clean environment is incompatible with economic growth and job creation. But we can and must have both. We need common sense regulations that protect the public, actually clean up the environment, and do so in a way that don't unnecessarily suffocate the economy or fail to consider the impact on American consumers and taxpayers. To this end, the EPA should focus on innovative problem solving and partnerships with states, tribes, and communities, the private sector, and other stakeholders that leverage their resources and enterprise.

I anticipate that much of the discussion today will focus on climate change and the appropriate role of the EPA in combating it. I want to be clear — climate change is real. And as I have stated numerous times, Republicans on this Committee stand ready, willing, and able to work with Democrats in a bipartisan way to continue to tackle climate change in a prudent and thoughtful manner.

I ask unanimous consent to enter in to the record a February 13, 2019, letter to Chairman Pallone and Environment and Climate Change Subcommittee Chairman Tonko from myself and Mr. Shimkus asking to do just that.

We can and must address climate change risks through American innovation, conservation, as well as adaptation and preparation. We should be focused on continuing to reduce emissions, developing and exporting clean energy technologies, and making our communities more resilient by adapting what we grow and how we build.

The EPA has an important role to play, by collecting emissions information and setting meaningful standards and regulations within the bounds of the statutory authority granted to the agency by Congress.

We should continue to make progress on reducing global climate risks without adding unnecessary regulatory burden by promoting policies favoring clean energy – like nuclear, hydropower, natural gas, wind, solar, and carbon capture, and removing barriers to the deployment of new technologies and innovation.

Republicans have a clear record of bipartisan legislation from this committee to do just that. Over the past several congresses, we have removed regulatory barriers to new technological advances in power generation, from hydroelectric power to small modular nuclear, from carbon capture and storage incentives to power grid reforms. Because innovation is where the long-term solutions to climate change are. We want America to lead the world in innovation, as we always have, especially on clean energy and environmental cleanup.

It also never hurts to work hard to root out unnecessary red-tape, to provide greater regulatory transparency so that stakeholders, including the regulated community, better know what is expected of them, and to promote prompt, even, and fair enforcement of the law.

Let's work together, as we have in the past, to reduce the barriers to innovation and unleash American ingenuity to develop new technologies to help confront the climate and other environment and public health challenges of the future. For example, the previous Republican-led Congresses have seen bipartisan responses to address contaminated drinking water in Flint, renew important drinking water programs – including those to address lead pipes – reinforce the essential Federal-state dynamic in environmental protection, and update toxic chemical review and management.

Moving forward, there is much that we could do right now, in a bipartisan way. For example, we could improve new source review permitting, essential to ensuring more efficient, cleaner operating stationary sources, and we could streamline the air quality standards process to ensure more effective implementation by states and localities.

This hearing is also a good opportunity to discuss whether and how the EPA itself and its legal authority need to be modernized to face 21st century challenges. We are beginning another wildfire season in Oregon and on the west coast. Last summer, smoke filled the air across large parts of Oregon and California, and certainly had a negative impact on air quality. The Clean Air Act was last updated in 1990. Does this nearly 30-year-old statute stand up in the face of the issues the EPA confronts today? The EPA itself has never been authorized by Congress – is it time for us to do so?

I thank our witnesses for being here today and hope that we can have a constructive conversation about the future and mission of the EPA.