

**Statement of the Honorable Christine Todd Whitman
to the
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.**

March 10, 2021

I would like to thank the Chair and the Ranking Member for the opportunity to speak with you today about the challenges facing the Environmental Protection Agency in the early days of the Biden administration.

Since its founding in 1970, EPA has made an enormous difference in America's quality of life. Our air is cleaner, our water purer, our land better protected, and our people healthier because of the work of the EPA.

In addition, EPA has shown that environmental protection and economic prosperity go hand in hand – and that safeguarding our environment also pays economic dividends, through the advancement of technology and the creation of jobs.

In recent years, the EPA has suffered under the leadership of people who seemed neither to understand, nor appreciate, the vital role that the EPA plays in American life.

The basic recognition that good science is the foundation of good policy has been eroded.

The morale of EPA's dedicated career civil servants has plummeted.

Important policies have been rolled back or gutted, not because of new scientific findings, but rather to appease powerful interests.

All this has both undermined the work of the EPA and has contributed to the loss of confidence of the American people in its government overall.

I am encouraged, however, that President Biden's nominee for EPA administrator, Michael Regan, has the experience, the expertise, and the credibility to restore people's faith in the EPA. Mr. Regan and I have discussed, at some length, the challenges and the opportunities he will face, should he be confirmed – and I hope he will be.

The first order of business for the new leadership at the EPA is to re-establish a commitment to sound science as an integral and indispensable part of policymaking. Fortunately, I expect that, under the new administration science, will again occupy its proper place.

Coupled with a return to science is the restoration of the morale of the people at EPA. Over the years, the Agency has been fortunate to be able to attract some of the finest scientific and policy talent available.

Yet, a recent study showed that between 2016 and 2020, EPA lost 672 scientific experts. That is troubling.

EPA must be able to retain the expertise it has while also attracting the best of the rising generation; those who will commit their careers to its mission. That's the only way the Agency can meet the many environmental challenges it faces.

The most pressing of these is, of course, the threat of global climate change.

Climate change has become a political football, and that is wrong. After all, the measures needed to address climate change make sense, both for the environment and for public health, no matter what one thinks about climate change.

Reducing carbon emissions, moving away from fossil fuels, expanding renewable energy, reducing the emissions of methane and volatile organic compounds and reviewing and revisiting many of the air rules put in place during the previous administration, all make sense whatever one's position on the threat of climate change.

They make sense, not only because they will help reduce the threat of climate change, but also because they will improve the quality of the air we breathe and will improve human health. That is a worthy and urgent pursuit in and of itself.

Turning next to environmental justice, I was pleased that President Biden is bringing into the White House the effort to advance environmental justice priorities. Leadership from the White House will make a huge difference.

The health and safety of people who live near pollution generating facilities must be better protected. And, working with state and local governments, EPA must do a better job in preventing the location of such new facilities in places that lack the political or economic clout to protect their communities and their residents.

EPA must also continue its efforts to identify emerging chemicals of concern and put in place regulations that safeguard the environment and human health.

EPA must also help tackle the enormous deficiencies in our water infrastructure.

America's aging water infrastructure wastes nearly six billion gallons of treated drinking water everyday through leakage. Another two trillion gallons of treated drinking water are lost due to water main breaks.

In addition, as many as 6.1 million homes in the United States are connected by lead service lines to the drinking water main that serves their neighborhood. Ingesting lead at any level is unsafe, especially for children. This threat must be eliminated.

Members of the subcommittee, over the past four years EPA and its mission have suffered. But EPA is resilient because its people are dedicated and determined to carry out their mission with scientific integrity and unwavering commitment.

I am optimistic that new administrator will renew EPA's mission. I urge the members of this subcommittee – on both sides of the aisle – to doing everything you can to encourage and advance EPA's success. Each of us is obligated to leave our environment better than we found it. With able leadership and a clear vision, I know EPA will again do its part.

Thank you.