



COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY & COMMERCE
DEMOCRATS
RANKING MEMBER FRANK PALLONE, JR.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 11, 2016

CONTACT

Andrew Souvall — (202) 225-5735

Pallone Denounces Harmful Bill That Would Weaken the Clean Air Act at Subcommittee Markup

Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) gave the following opening statement today at a Subcommittee on Energy and Power markup of H.R. 4979, the “Advanced Nuclear Technology Development Act of 2016,” and H.R. 4775, the “Ozone Standards Implementation Act.”

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Tomorrow, this subcommittee will be marking up two bills.

The first bill is H.R. 4979, the “Advanced Nuclear Technology Development Act of 2016,” which was introduced by Representatives Latta and McNerney. The bill seeks to enhance coordination between the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the Department of Energy through a memorandum of understanding on issues related to advanced nuclear reactor technology. This is a worthy goal. While I believe there are a few small issues with the bill that may need to be worked out before full committee consideration, overall this is a commonsense way for the federal government to support the advanced nuclear power industry.

On the other hand, the second bill – H.R. 4775, the “Ozone Standards Implementation Act” – is an irresponsible attack that strikes at the heart of the Clean Air Act and would undermine decades of progress on cleaning up pollution and protecting public health.

Weakening the protections of the Clean Air Act won’t make air pollution go away. And the “Ozone Standards Implementation Act” won’t do anything to actually help implement EPA’s ozone standards. Instead, the bill is squarely focused on systematically weakening the fundamental protections that the Clean Air Act provides to the American people.

The bill’s sponsors say the goal of this legislation is to facilitate a more efficient implementation of EPA’s National Ambient Air Quality Standards by states. However, states have decades of experience implementing air quality standards, and I have serious concerns with the premise and execution of many of the provisions in this bill.

First, the cornerstone of the Clean Air Act is a series of health-based air quality standards that EPA must set based solely on the latest science and medical evidence. Essentially, the standard sets the level of pollution that is “safe” to breathe. With these health-based standards as the goal posts, states then develop plans to control pollution and meet those goals. Cost and technological feasibility are front and center in this planning and states can identify which pollution control measures are best suited to meeting the standard in the most cost-effective way.

The bill would up-end this effective approach. It would elevate cost and feasibility considerations in the standard-setting process, not just for ozone, but also for carbon monoxide, sulfur oxides, nitrogen oxides, particle pollution and even lead. This would allow polluters to override scientists, leading to air quality standards based on profits rather than health.

Next, the bill would delay implementation of the new, more protective ozone standard by up to eight years, essentially denying the public the right to clean and healthy air that is long overdue.

And it gets worse, the bill also doubles EPA’s review period of air quality standards for all six criteria pollutants, meaning any new evidence or science would only be considered every 10 years. Delaying EPA’s review of the best medical science won’t make outdated air pollution levels safe – it will just lead to more Americans suffering from unhealthy air for a longer period of time. This is a dramatic move in the wrong direction on science-based decision-making

My Republican colleagues like to say that we have made tremendous progress in reducing air pollution in this country. That is true. However, it doesn’t mean that we no longer need the tools that got us here, or that the job is done.

We’ve made progress because Congress enacted a strong and effective Clean Air Act. If we weaken the law by passing bills like the “Ozone Standards Implementation Act,” then air quality will suffer, public health will suffer and we will throw away decades of progress.

###