

Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Environment
Hearing on “H.R. 806, Ozone Standards Implementation Act of
2017”
March 22, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

The bill under review this morning provides a promising start to the committee’s goal of developing and moving common-sense measures that will reduce the barriers to a more productive U.S. economy — while preserving the public health and well-being of Americans. H.R. 806 represents the kind of targeted legislative updates to our environmental laws that will fix provisions that are threatening to do more harm than good, given existing regulations and the tremendous advances in air quality.

This bill is about providing sensible tools and relief to state and local authorities so they can more effectively implement air quality standards for the benefit of their communities. It is also about ensuring appropriate timelines to enable authorities to do this without unnecessarily restraining economic development, especially the development we need to accelerate the nation’s infrastructure and manufacturing capabilities.

There is no question federal clean-air laws — and state authorities that implement those laws — have been tremendously successful since the first major revision of the Clean Air Act in 1970. As EPA reports, in aggregate, emissions of key air pollutants have declined 71% since 1970. As a result, the air we breathe has improved dramatically according to nationwide trends: Since 1980, data show ozone is down 32%; nitrogen dioxide is down 60%; and particulate matter, just in the past 15 years, is down almost 40%. Of course, much of this improvement over 37 years has occurred against the backdrop, overall, of an expanding economy.

But, there also should be no question that the actual margins for continued improvement are also declining, especially with existing technologies.

As state and local air-quality regulators implement new rules to drive down pollutant levels in response to statutory mandates, more areas of the nation come closer to natural and technological barriers to continued improvement. Failure to account properly for the existence of these barriers — or to provide reasonable time

for existing measures to produce results—threatens damaging economic consequences.

I note, for example, Mr. Sadredin’s testimony provides the troubling example that almost all economic activity could be stopped in California’s great San Joaquin Valley—including preventing highway thru traffic—and there would no meaningful improvement to air quality in that region. Yet without legislative and regulatory reforms, federal requirements will just keep mounting, stifling economic opportunity and growth in that important region.

We should take this example and the examples from our other state witnesses this morning as a warning of what more regions may confront as air quality standards are tightened at a pace faster than innovation, technology and the regulatory implementation process can reasonably keep up.

Congress did not enact the Clean Air Act to be a regional economy killer. The good news is there are sensible reforms that will update the act, both to reflect the progress we have made and to account for current, practical factors that affect continued improvement.

As I’ve noted previously, there are many opportunities before the committee to make meaningful improvements in our environmental laws and regulations—the outcome of which will be good for public health and good for the economy. Today is just the beginning.