

Opening Statement of the Honorable John Shimkus
Subcommittee on Environment
Hearing on “The Mission of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency”
December 7, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

The Subcommittee will now come to order.

Before I begin my opening statement, I want to make a general announcement to members about process for today. After months of trying to find a mutually acceptable date for a hearing, the Committee was able to finally get agreement from Administrator Pruitt to join us and we announced it. At the end of last week, however, the Committee learned Mr. Pruitt was being summoned to meet with his boss, the President, for 90 minutes around lunch. Rather than agreeing to start the hearing earlier and have a defined end time, push the entire hearing to a late afternoon start time, or try to again find another mutually acceptable date, we have come to an agreement which we understand is not ideal, but gives members maximum ability to personally question the Administrator about the Agency’s mission.

Therefore, we will proceed with opening statements, the Administrator’s testimony, and Member questions until 11am. We will recess at that time and reconvene at 2pm in 2322. We expect the Administrator will stay with us until Committee Members who are present and want to ask questions have been given their turn to ask questions.

Administrator Pruitt I want to thank you for joining us today and discussing issues the Environment Subcommittee has jurisdiction over, notably, the Clean Air Act, CERCLA, the Solid Waste Disposal Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, and the Toxic Substances Control Act. A few years ago, we began an effort to tackle updating and reauthorizing a number of these laws and we have been waiting for the opportunity for you or someone from your Agency to be here so that we can discuss the Administration’s position on these important changes to the laws EPA implements. We are also tasked with oversight of these EPA programs and we look forward to being able to start conducting oversight hearings soon.

Today we would like to start a dialogue with you about your vision and priorities for EPA.

You noted at the outset of your tenure at EPA that your goal was to refocus EPA on its intended mission, return power to the states, and create an environment where jobs can grow, and your agenda focused on the three *E*'s:

Environment: Protecting the environment;

Economy: Sensible regulations that allow economic growth;

Engagement: Engaging with state and local partners.

You also stated that EPA should “operate within the statutes that Congress passes and not reimagine authority to pick winners and losers.”

That sounds like you are headed in the right direction. We support analyzing regulatory barriers to determine whether they create unnecessary burdens or impede job creation and we want to work with you to make sure that EPA develops and implements regulations that protect the environment while promoting growth and creating jobs. You said it best in a statement you made when you kicked off your “back to basics” agenda earlier this year, “we can, and we will achieve clean air and clean water and we will also have strong economic growth and job creation at the same time.”

We have some specific areas of focus that we would like to discuss today and continue to work on with you and your staff going forward.

The first is Superfund cleanup. You have indicated that Superfund cleanup is a priority of the Agency and that several cleanup efforts have been “restored to their rightful place at the center of the agency’s core mission.” You have also noted that you intend to figure out ways to cut through the bureaucratic red tape that has slowed the cleanup of Superfund sites and that EPA is creating a list of the top ten sites that the agency can aggressively address. We want to work with you on these efforts and work together to figure out what Congress can do to help make Superfund cleanups more efficient.

The next issues are Toxic Substances Control Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act. Last year, this Subcommittee was responsible for overhauling TSCA and we are interested in the appropriate and timely implementation of the rules that are the outgrowth of the new law. We also look forward to work with the Agency as we reauthorize the funding and make improvements in the law to improve compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Act.

Last, but not least, the Clean Air Act. Our members are actively engaged on several air issues like the Clean Power Plan and EPA's recent ozone standard, which has created obstacles to new infrastructure development and manufacturing. We also want to look into addressing the challenges relating to obtaining air permits required for new construction and expansions of existing facilities under EPA's New Source Review program.

Administrator Pruitt, the long and short of it is that we have an agenda packed with legislative and oversight activities and we need EPA to be an engaged participant that works with us as we move forward. We need to be assured that the Agency will send us witnesses for legislative and oversight hearings and in turn, we will work with you to figure out where Congress needs to act to help accomplish the Agency's goals of providing regulatory certainty, balancing environmental benefits and economic practicalities, and restoring confidence to regulated entities across the country. Thank you for coming up here and we look forward to continuing this conversation in the new year.

With that, I yield back my time and now yield to my friend from New York, the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, Mr. Tonko.