

Opening

The Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change will now come to order. I recognize myself for five minutes for the purposes of an opening statement.

Today, the Subcommittee will hold its first markup of the 116th Congress. The agenda includes 15 bills reflecting the work done through our oversight and legislative hearings during the first half of the year.

This includes H.R. 1603, the Alan Reinstein Ban Asbestos Now Act of 2019, which would take the long overdue step of banning asbestos in the United States.

We have heard the importance of this bill from workers, firefighters, and families that have suffered from asbestos-related diseases.

I do not believe anyone here wants asbestos to continue to be imported and used in our country.

This bill would have us follow the lead of more than 60 countries that moved forward with bans; because despite our best efforts decades ago, Americans are still living with asbestos in an untold number of buildings—and what is worse— purchasing crayons, makeup, and other products containing asbestos.

This is unacceptable, and it must end as quickly as possible.

So I want to thank Mr. Shimkus and the minority staff for being willing to work with us on this bill.

This is the way the process is meant to work.

We heard a handful of concerns at our legislative hearing, and we have continued to discuss how we might be able to address them in a way that is acceptable to both sides as well as almost every interested stakeholders.

I am hopeful we can reach an agreement on changes to the text before Full Committee.

We will also consider 13 bills that take a variety of steps to respond to the emerging and growing environmental and public health threat of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, commonly known as PFAS.

These chemicals are persistent in the environment, incredibly toxic, and dangerous to human health even in very small concentrations.

We are still learning the full extent of the dangers, but PFAS exposure has been linked to kidney disease, thyroid dysfunction, and various forms of cancer.

These bills cross numerous statutes within our jurisdiction, including the Safe Drinking Water Act, Superfund, TSCA, and the Clean Air Act.

Collectively these bills would do a lot of good to reduce Americans' exposure to PFAS through our air, water, and consumer products.

They include increasing testing, promoting consumer awareness, and ensuring disclosure, treatment, and remediation when PFAS is released into, or found in, the environment.

Dealing with PFAS contamination has been a tragic experience in Upstate New York.

I know that is also true for an increasing number of communities across the country.

I hope we can respond in a way that either prevents other communities and individuals from having to go through this, or at least gives them the legal tools to respond robustly.

I am also all too aware that a number of PFAS provisions were included in this year's National Defense Authorization Act, which is currently being negotiated by a conference committee.

We know how our colleagues in the Senate operate. We know they stick provisions on nongermane bills.

If the NDAA is their vehicle for getting PFAS legislation enacted, I am open to those discussions, but that should not be an excuse for us not to also move bills in the House through the Committee of jurisdiction and through regular order.

I will also note that some of the bills being considered today are outside the scope of that negotiation, and I hope we can continue to work to find common ground where possible to advance a meaningful PFAS package through this Committee.

Finally, H.R. 2699, the Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act of 2019, was introduced by Congressman McNerney and Ranking Member Shimkus.

This bill builds on the hard work done last year under Mr. Shimkus's leadership.

In the 115th Congress, a very similar bill passed this committee 49 to 4.

We know nuclear waste issues are politically challenging, but it is an important responsibility of this Subcommittee to continue to work to solve.

I want to thank my colleagues for their efforts to assist communities dealing with waste and protect taxpayers from the need to make even more payments from the Treasury.

I hope we can report all these bills today, and where possible continue negotiating before Full Committee to reach bipartisan agreement.

With that, I yield back.