

Opening Statement of Republican Leader John Shimkus
Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change Hearing
“The Fiscal Year 2021 Environmental Protection Agency Budget”
February 27, 2020
As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for recognizing me for an opening statement about today’s subcommittee hearing on the President’s proposed budget for the Environmental Protection Agency in fiscal year 2021.

I want to join you in welcoming the Administrator, Andrew Wheeler, back to the Committee on Energy and Commerce.

It is good to have the Agency here to answer for itself on policy calls and budget recommendations made in the President’s budget. Let’s remember, though, that this proposed budget – actually any President’s budget – is not binding on anything Congress ultimately decides to do. In my over two decades here, I have yet to see a Congress copy a President’s budget and pass it as it was sent up to us.

During my first EPA budget hearing as a Ranking Member of this Subcommittee – back in 2007 – the run up to the hearing was littered with press statements about how the Bush EPA didn’t care about the environment because it didn’t propose the level of funding its political opponents desired. I noted then and I note now that the Beatles had it correctly: money cannot buy you love – and it’s certainly no determinant of an improving environment.

There are lots of worthy ideas and programs that EPA could address, but does it make the most sense to have EPA be the one to do it every time? We should not advocate for more funding if all it is buying us is bureaucracy,

regulatory confusion with other agencies, or programs that don't really improve public health or the environment but take funding from ones that do.

I have said it before, but I believe it bears repeating we need to not only know how Americans' tax dollars are being spent, but are Americans' getting a better quality of life for their return on investment.

At a macro level, the indicators are that our environment is in much better shape than when the Agency first opened its doors for business -- trends in air, water, and soil pollution show downward trends.

For example, before 1970, EPA reported 40 percent of our nation's drinking water systems failed to meet basic health standards. Today, EPA says 92 percent of Americans receive potable water from water utilities that meet ALL health-based standards.

In terms of air quality, between 1970 and 2018, the combined emissions of six common pollutants – including particulate matter, carbon monoxide and sulfur dioxide – dropped by 74 percent in the United States. The air we are breathing today is cleaner than when the Agency opened its doors five decades ago.

At a micro level, between newer and more powerful detection equipment, emerging questions about toxicity, and an aging workforce at EPA; nagging questions and new challenges pit resources and long-term priorities against each other.

As the Environmental Protection Agency is in the process of celebrating its 50th year of operation, serious questions need important thought to help transition from an EPA geared for previous generations to one prepared for future ones.

I am pleased this Administration has deployed objective metrics to better access its “deliverables.” I hope to explore this area during my questions and hope the answers demonstrate an Agency geared towards following the law and delivering results.

Before I yield back my time, Mr. Chairman, I do want to congratulate Administrator Wheeler for some of his recent actions to provide American’s safe drinking water – the issuance of a proposed update to the Lead and Copper Rule and preliminary determinations to regulate PFOA and PFOS. These are significant developments that have been anticipated for quite some time. I applaud you for recognizing that access to safe drinking water is an important environmental threat and being the one to stand up and act.

Again, welcome, Administrator Wheeler.

I thank the Chairman for yielding me this time and for holding this important hearing.