

## **Mr. Tonko's Opening**

*The Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change will now come to order. I recognize myself for 5 minutes for the purposes of an opening statement.*

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This morning we welcome EPA Administrator Wheeler back to the Subcommittee to examine the President's Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2021.

Mr. Wheeler, thank you for being here.

This year's budget should be familiar to members of the Subcommittee.

Once again, the President has proposed significant cuts; this time 26% below last year's enacted levels.

If enacted, I fear this funding level will jeopardize the Agency's ability to fulfill its mission of protecting Americans' health and our environment, and I am certain that the House will reject this request.

Even in areas that the Administration has singled out as priorities, there are drastic cuts.

The Drinking Water SRF, for example, was proposed to be reduced by over \$260 million despite the Agency's most recent Needs Assessment finding that the amount of needed capital investment continues to grow.

By contrast, the Majority's infrastructure plan recognizes this need and proposes significantly increased funding for our nation's drinking water systems.

Superfund, another one of the Administration's priorities, was reduced by more than \$110 million despite EPA facing the biggest backlog of unfunded projects in 15 years.

I am also concerned that the request includes a proposed 11% reduction to EPA staff, which is already operating at low levels.

There are significant numbers of experienced and dedicated employees leaving or retiring—taking their institutional knowledge along with them—and they are not being replaced at the same rate.

In addition to the budget, members of the Subcommittee will be interested in receiving updates on EPA's regulatory agenda.

I believe many of us are concerned that EPA is not acting urgently or comprehensively enough to address serious risks to Americans' drinking water.

Last year, EPA issued its long-term revision of the Lead and Copper Rule, which in my opinion falls short of what is necessary to reduce the threat of lead in drinking water.

And last week, EPA made a proposed regulatory determination for PFOA and PFOS.

We are still months away from a final regulatory determination.

And if experience with perchlorate (“*perchlor-ate*”) has taught us anything, we may be waiting a long time before we see any finalized standard, let alone a standard that is protective of vulnerable populations.

Finally, I am extremely concerned by the political leadership’s continued treatment of scientific expertise within the agency and outside advisors.

I want to highlight a story in the *Washington Post* from December entitled, “EPA’s scientific advisers warn its regulatory rollbacks clash with established science.”

EPA’s Science Advisory Board, which includes many appointees by this Administration, has raised concerns and objections that several of the most significant proposed rollbacks of environmental protections are at odds with the scientific record, and proposed process changes may have long-term, detrimental impacts at the Agency.

For example, the Board’s draft review of the “Science Transparency” rule, stated that it “could easily undercut the integrity of environmental laws, as it will allow systematic bias to be introduced with no easy remedy.”

A memo from the Administrator to Board members this week raises further concerns about the Administration’s efforts to sideline independent scientific review of its work.

It is critical that our public health protections be grounded in robust science, and sadly, I believe the Administration continues to dismiss science and expertise whenever it conflicts with its deregulatory agenda.

Mr. Wheeler, I thank you again for joining us. I look forward to today’s discussion.