

**Opening Statement of Republican Leader Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change
“The Fiscal Year 2021 EPA Budget”
February 27, 2020**

As Prepared for Delivery

Welcome back to the committee, Administrator Wheeler.

We and our staff interact frequently with you, your offices, and your staff throughout the year, but this annual appearance to discuss the President’s proposed budget for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) offers a good opportunity for the committee and the public to take a full look at your priorities, and the agency’s performance.

By any measure, EPA serves a critical role to inform and advance policies to protect public health and the environment—from its standard setting, to its regulatory science and risk assessments, to its technical and financial assistance for states, tribal communities, and localities.

And, by any measure, EPA has developed a strong record of success over its fifty-year history, as well as in recent years. According to [EPA’s most recent numbers](#), from 2016 through 2018 all criteria air pollutants continue to decrease, adding to long term positive trends; the air is substantially cleaner and clearer.

Similar improvements have been accomplished in the nation's drinking water systems. And, as we examined in a hearing just two weeks ago, the agency is actively working to strengthen and accelerate removal of lead lines from these systems.

Today, fully 93% of the nation's drinking water systems meet all health-based standards, all the time—up from 60% of systems fifty years ago, when EPA was first organized.

We will talk today about progress to return polluted land to beneficial use, one of the priorities of this committee over the past two Congresses.

I understand, for example, that the agency has made substantial strides cleaning up Superfund sites so that more communities can work to produce economic opportunity and jobs at those sites. On this point, I am pleased to see the Administrator is continuing to emphasize Portland Harbor for cleanup, which is important for Oregon.

And concerning the Brownfields Program, another committee priority: it is encouraging to learn that EPA has been surpassing its goals for returning land to good economic use – making some 1,770 sites ready for anticipated use over the past two years.

While there continues to be many environmental risks and regulatory challenges to address, as we will also talk about today, we should recognize that environmental and economic improvements are continuing against the backdrop of the current Administration's broader economic policies.

Economic data shows how the Administration's [pro-worker policies](#) have contributed to healthy economic growth, increasing household incomes, record low unemployment especially among the middle-and lower-income classes, and reinvigorated manufacturing and industry.

Much of this economic good news has occurred because of sound tax policy, the tremendous benefits of our energy revolution, removal of regulatory barriers to economic initiative, and a focus on what is in the best interest of the American consumer.

It should be clear that environmental progress is not an impediment to economic growth. Indeed, the example of improving environmental metrics and the EPA's priorities to reuse formerly contaminated sites, to create opportunity zones for underserved communities underscores how environmental improvement creates economic opportunity.

However, we should not fall for deceptive arguments that a history of economic growth justifies more environmental regulation; this ignores the lost economic opportunities of regulatory costs and delay, which do not show up in GDP reports.

Instead, as this Administration has been doing, we should recognize the economic potential and additional environmental benefits of updated, more streamlined regulations, and more efficient EPA permitting and environmental guidance. This lends more certainty to development decisions and more effective decisions by the states and localities.

For years I heard from farmers and ranchers across Oregon that the Obama administration's overreaching definitions would subject intermittent streams and irrigation ditches to heavy handed federal regulation. I applaud this administration for hearing their concerns and acting to replace that flawed rule with one that appropriately redefines Waters of the United States.

During our hearings on the wildfire and forest management crisis, witnesses have demonstrated how NEPA regulations lead to cost and delay, increasing risks for devastating fire. During the last Congress, we

learned how uncertainty over EPA permitting and New Source Review led to facilities choosing not to make environmental improvements. When so called “regulatory rollbacks” result in more efficient, cleaner operations, and more economic opportunity, those actions should be encouraged, not demonized.

For this reason, Administrator Wheeler’s focus on returning to core missions, on cooperative work with the states, on ensuring sound science and regulatory process, and on reducing unnecessary regulatory burdens represent the ingredients for continued environmental progress.

I look forward to exploring with the Administrator why these priorities will work states and communities this morning.