

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.

Hearing on “Protecting American Manufacturing: Examining EPA’s Proposed PM2.5 Rule”

September 19, 2023

Today we will be discussing the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) proposed National Ambient Air Quality Standards for fine particulate matter, or the PM 2.5 NAAQS. This proposal is a welcome update to outdated standards and is critical to reducing dangerous air pollution and protecting communities across the nation.

Fine particulate matter poses a significant health risk to communities, including increased rates of heart disease, serious respiratory impacts, and even death. It can be emitted into the air from power plants, industrial facilities, and vehicles, but it can also come from construction sites, unpaved roads, fields, smokestacks, or fires. Even short-term exposure for hours or days can cause aggravated asthma attacks, acute bronchitis, and increased susceptibility to respiratory infections. And we know that these impacts are even more acute in sensitive populations – like children, pregnant women, the elderly, and underserved communities.

Since 1970, the Clean Air Act has directed the EPA to set health-based air quality standards based solely on the latest science and medical evidence. NAAQS essentially sets the level of pollution that is “safe” to breathe. States then develop plans to control pollution and meet these goals. Cost and technological feasibility are front and center in this planning. States can identify which pollution control measures are best suited to meeting the standard in the most cost-effective way. This structure has been extraordinarily effective for over 50 years in cleaning the air and protecting public health, including the health of sensitive groups.

The Trump Administration shirked its duty to protect public health by retaining the current, outdated standard for fine particulate matter. This decision went against the recommendations of experts and science. When President Biden came into office, his Administration revisited the standard to ensure that the health of American communities are protected. This is something the EPA is required to do.

Following careful review of the scientific evidence and consulting with the Agency’s independent scientific advisors, EPA recently proposed to strengthen the fine particulate matter NAAQS. The proposal would prevent at least 1,700 deaths and provide \$17 billion in net public health benefits in 2032. This would be an incredible win for the American people. Unfortunately, Committee Republicans want to keep the status quo – they simply have no interest in protecting people’s health and instead want to protect industry and polluters. Republicans are essentially saying that we must choose between cleaner air and a strong economy. They are wrong. We do not have to choose. We can have both. In fact, we have achieved both under the Clean Air Act, which has shown time and again that strong environmental safeguards and strong economic

September 19, 2023

Page 2

growth go hand in hand. Between 1970 and 2022, air pollutant emissions dropped by 78 percent, while our nation's gross domestic product has nearly quadrupled.

While Republicans have failed to offer any practical solutions to address the serious threat of air pollution, Democrats are fighting for workers and families. While Republicans are pushing their "just say no" policies, Democrats are making investments into clean technologies that will grow our economy and foster a more sustainable future. And while Republicans are willing to let air pollution go unchecked as part of their polluters over people agenda, Democrats are advocating for strong, science-based standards that put the health of Americans first. Because let's be honest, a person's health is not and should not be a bargaining chip.

But House Republicans are putting American lives at risk by supporting the status quo on NAAQS and by proposing a 39 percent cut to EPA's budget. Of course, they are finding it impossible to bring any appropriations bills to fund the government to the floor because they repeatedly cave to the extreme elements in their party.

And now, they are threatening a government shutdown at the end of this month that would hurt American families. Instead of undermining the law and gutting the EPA, we should provide adequate resources to the Agency and to the states to continue to give every American clean, healthy air to breathe.

I yield back the balance of my time.