

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Ranking Member Frank Pallone**

Environment, Manufacturing, and Critical Materials Subcommittee Markup of One Bill

March 6, 2024

This afternoon, Committee Republicans continue their polluters over people agenda with legislation that sells out the American people in favor of their corporate polluting friends. Just this morning Republicans voted to advance a suite of blatantly partisan legislation that would raise Americans' energy bills and lead to the construction of more dangerous pipelines.

Now, Republicans are returning to a tired playbook of attacking the health-based air quality standards at the heart of the Clean Air Act. This is not a new line of attack – the Committee has considered these harmful ideas several times in the past. Fortunately, they have never become law, and they are not going to now, either.

Today's markup stands in stark contrast to the passage of the Clean Air Act. Over 50 years ago, Democrats and Republicans in this Committee came together on an overwhelmingly bipartisan basis to pass critical air quality protections into law. Since then, the Clean Air Act has been successful in cleaning up dangerous air pollution and protecting the health of American communities and families.

The foundation of the Act is a set of health-based air quality standards based solely on the latest science and medical evidence. The National Ambient Air Quality Standards or NAAQS essentially establishes the level of pollution that is "safe" to breathe.

That's why I'm pleased the Biden EPA recently strengthened the NAAQS for fine particulate matter, also known as PM 2.5. Fine particulate matter poses serious and significant health risks to our communities every day, including increased rates of heart disease and respiratory impacts. Even short-term exposure for hours or days can cause aggravated asthma attacks, respiratory inflammation, and other human health harms. This pollution is dangerous, and Americans have a right to clean, safe air.

The Biden Administration's announcement is a welcome return to pollution standards based on science. Under the new standard, we'll see significant public health benefits of up to \$46 billion in 2032 alone. EPA also projects the new standard will avoid 800,000 asthma attacks, nearly 300,000 lost workdays, and thousands of premature deaths.

Now it is up to the states to develop plans to implement this more protective standard. States have the flexibility to select the most efficient and cost-effective tools and measures to meet the standard. And this structure has a remarkably successful track record: the air has gotten cleaner, the economy has continued to grow, and most importantly – public health has improved.

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But the Republican majority is not interested in the Clean Air Act's record of success. This Republican Committee print is clearly a response to EPA upholding its duty to protect communities across the nation from dangerous air pollution like ozone and fine particulate matter.

This Republican legislation is a compilation of misguided handouts to corporate polluters. The draft would allow industry profits to override science in setting air quality standards, provide amnesty to new polluting facilities at the expense of existing manufacturing, and remove incentives to cut pollution. It would also weaken and delay the fundamental protections in the law, virtually guaranteeing that people living in areas with poor air quality will continue to breathe unhealthy air.

What's more, Republicans are peddling misinformation to justify this bill. Last month, at the legislative hearing, they made baseless claims that improved air quality standards would stop permitting in the United States, and directly questioned long established science linking air pollution and asthma.

Time and again, Committee Republican have claimed that this draft proposal would not increase air pollution or undermine the public health protections currently found in the Clean Air Act. But they are wrong. By altering the fundamental premise of the Clean Air Act – that standards should be set to safeguard public health – Republicans are making our air dirtier and endangering the lives of families, children, and workers.

Our experience with the Clean Air Act tells us that we don't have to choose between the health of our communities and a healthy economy. We can, and must, have both. This proposal is an attack on the health and safety of the American people. And that's why I continue to oppose it.

And with that, I yield back the balance of my time.