

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Environment, Manufacturing, and Critical Materials Ranking Member
Paul D. Tonko

Hearing on “Holding the Biden-Harris EPA Accountable for Radical Rush-to-Green Spending”

September 19, 2024

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to welcome Inspector General O’Donnell back to the Committee. I value the important role that Inspectors General play in conducting oversight and protecting against waste, fraud, and abuse. And Mr. O’Donnell, I want to assure you that I support providing your office with the resources necessary for you to carry out your duties.

I understand, based on your testimony, that you have some concerns about EPA’s ability to manage the historic funding it has been provided under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act. The reality is that whether it is in the public sector, the private sector, or even in our personal lives, doing anything new and ambitious can be challenging.

But we should be working to rise to meet those challenges. And in this instance, Congress can continue to provide support to EPA to ensure its success. Because, yes, the investments being made under the IJJA and IRA are historically large. But that is because the Congressional supporters of those laws felt the scale of our nation’s infrastructure, environmental, and public health challenges required a historically large response.

Make no mistake, these investments are massively improving the lives of Americans. This includes more than \$35 billion to repair our drinking water infrastructure and replace dangerous lead pipes, \$5 billion to remediate brownfields and Superfund sites, \$5 billion to deploy clean school buses, and billions more for clean energy and pollution reducing investments with a focus on underserved communities. Undoubtedly, these investments will improve public health and create tremendous economic development opportunities.

I would be the first to admit that these programs deserve appropriate oversight. No one wants money to be spent ineffectively when it can be doing good for the American people. But proper oversight should not equate to hoping— or actively seeking— to undermine these federal programs. And that is why I take issue with the majority’s hearing title, which claims that today is about holding EPA accountable for green spending.

I would remind my colleagues that the EPA is merely following the laws that were written— proudly, I might add— in large part by Democrats on this Committee, and supported by a majority of Members in both chambers of Congress.

Frankly, we would need to hold EPA accountable if they were FAILING to follow the law by not spending this money.

My colleagues across the aisle have not been shy about their dislike for these infrastructure, remediation, and pollution reduction investments. And they are well-within their rights to continue their crusade to repeal major sections of these laws, as they have tried and failed to do on numerous occasions over the past two years, regardless of how many benefits will be provided to the American people.

I know we have got into the habit of inviting Inspector General O'Donnell to the Committee and asking— often prematurely— about all the potential problems, both real and imagined, that could occur with the administration of these funds. But I would encourage my colleagues across the aisle to take up their ideological issues about the IJA and IRA with us— House Democrats. And I would certainly welcome everyone across the aisle telling the American people that Congressional Democrats are to blame for getting the lead pipes out of their drinking water, for getting their kids off of polluting school buses, and for finally cleaning up those brownfields that have been eyesores in their neighborhoods for years.

Inspector General, I thank you again for being here. I want to reiterate that I want these programs to be successful. I want them to be administered effectively. Any dollar being wasted is a dollar not helping the American people as intended by the supporters of these laws. But I also want us to have a fair-minded conversation about the legitimate administrative challenges EPA may be dealing with.

Thank you. I yield back.