



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON  
**SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY**

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Opening Statement

**Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)**

Full Committee Hearing:  
*Science and Technology at the Environmental Protection Agency*  
Thursday, September 19, 2019

Good morning. I would like to welcome Administrator Wheeler to the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology for the first time. The Members of this Committee look forward to your testimony today as we all understand and value the important role the EPA plays in the health, safety, and prosperity of our communities.

I know I speak for many of my colleagues when I say that our constituents also understand the importance of a strong EPA, and they are paying attention to the decisions being made here in Washington. They reach out to us when they hear about the dismantling of clean air standards, because they are concerned it could exacerbate their children's asthma. They reach out to us when EPA's own IRIS assessments show that chemicals being released from nearby facilities could pose serious health risks to their families.

They reach out to us because Congress has a responsibility to the American public to protect their best interests through dedicated oversight of the Federal agencies that are supposed to be protecting their health and safety.

This Administration has shown that its priorities do not lie with the average American. Draconian cuts in the President's budget requests have sought to cut funding for EPA's research and development nearly in half. The research that EPA funds has been vital to the development of its landmark public health protections. The research conducted and supported by the EPA is not replicated by any other local, state, or federal agency. Cutting this critical research to the levels proposed by this Administration would be an insurmountable loss to environmental science and public health.

It is profoundly disturbing to see the actions this EPA has taken to dismantle many of its own standards and regulations that were established primarily to protect public health. This Administration's push to deregulate seems to be led by political ideologues, with limited input from scientific experts. Remarkably, sometimes this Administration's zeal to roll back public health protections even exceeds the desires of industry. Many members of the regulated community have come out in opposition to EPA's recent actions to roll back regulations on

glider trucks, methane emissions from the oil and gas industry, and EPA's unprecedented and ill-advised revocation of California's authority to set its own clean car standards.

Since the establishment of the EPA nearly 50 years ago, this country has shown that we can protect everyone, from our most vulnerable populations to our most healthy, without sacrificing economic growth. But it is naive to think that because the EPA has been so successful in accomplishing its mission over the past decades that we can now roll back regulations in order to benefit industry and expect no negative impacts to public health.

Environmental protection is an ongoing process. It requires the persistence that is exemplified by the dedicated scientists and engineers who work at the EPA. These committed public servants have the full support of the American people. But they need your full support, Mr. Administrator, as well as the full support of Congress, to help them continue to carry out the Agency's mission.

Let me be clear, gutting the role of science in EPA's regulatory and decision-making processes will not make our air safer to breathe, or our water safer to drink.

As the Congressional Committee with jurisdiction over research and development activities at EPA, my colleagues and I take our oversight role very seriously. We have attempted to engage with you and your staff, Mr. Administrator, on a number of issues that directly impact public health. We are still waiting for adequate responses from the Agency on many of these inquiries. Simply stating the total number of pages of documents provided to the Committee does not address whether they are responsive to our requests.

I hope this will not be the only time we see you before this Committee, and that today marks the start of an open dialogue between our Members and yourself. We look forward to working together with you to ensure that the best interests of the American public are at the heart of the EPA's actions, and that those actions are informed by the high-caliber science that distinguishes EPA on the world stage.