



COMMITTEE ON

SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

REPUBLICANS

Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

Ranking Member Norman
Environment Subcommittee Hearing Opening Statement
“EPA Advisory Committees: How Science Should Inform Decisions”
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Thank you, Chairwoman Sherrill and Chairwoman Fletcher, for convening this hearing.

We are here today to discuss the current state of federal advisory committees, specifically at the EPA, and the appointment process for these committees.

Unfortunately, this hearing is less of a discussion, rather just another example of partisan politics. By limiting the scope of this hearing “specifically” to the EPA, the majority has prevented us from conducting oversight of other agencies within our jurisdiction.

But even the narrow focus on the EPA wasn’t enough. While the Science Advisory Board (SAB), the Board of Scientific Counselors (BOSC), and the Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee (CASAC) are all represented here today, they seem to be the only ones we’ll be discussing.

Along with EPA’s other advisory committees, the SAB and CASAC build scientific consensus and provide input and recommendations from EPA’s diverse stakeholders.

While our witnesses do valuable work for their panels, they only represent three of EPA’s 22 committees.

That means – in a hearing about EPA’s advisory committees – 19 committees are unrepresented, as well as every other agencies’ Federal Advisory Committees

Why are we limiting this hearing when so many more panels fall within the Science Committee’s jurisdiction? My colleagues on the other side of the aisle seem to be using this opportunity as a thinly veiled cover to simply attack the EPA and this Administration’s effort to improve the selection process.

Today, we’ll hear about how academics are supposedly being kicked off these committees and that critical steps were overlooked in the appointment process. But upon further examination of the data, including data provided by GAO in their report, I believe this Committee needs to carefully examine the facts around these misleading assumptions.

The purpose of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) is clear: committees should be fairly balanced in expertise and points of view. Yet, in 2017, 77% of S-A-B members represented academia.

Having over three-fourths of a panel affiliated with one stakeholder group doesn't strike me as balanced. It is clear to me that EPA leadership followed the direction of the law as they worked to restore balance to this critical committee.

We'll also discuss GAO's finding that 20 members of SAB and CASAC were appointed without EPA staff providing a membership grid with recommendations. While this step is detailed in EPA's internal policy guidelines, no law was broken and no mismanagement occurred.

Instead, senior officials at the EPA replaced this step with a more rigorous process, where the Administrator was thoroughly briefed on the qualifications of multiple candidates.

It is the Administrator's job to set guidance and ensure the agency can achieve its goals. We should be applauding him for taking the time to examine each candidate in an effort to better the appointment process.

I also want to commend the Science Advisory Board Staff Office (SABSO), for their diligent work to ensure the best candidates are chosen to serve on FAC's. Sadly, these individuals are not present as we evaluate whether the new review process is effective.

The rushed nature of this hearing is disappointing, yet not surprising, to me. Members of this Committee were given limited time to review GAO's report, which was released just 24 hours ago.

I thank Mr. Gomez for being here to walk us through it, but I know we could have had a more productive discussion if we all had time to read it and understand it.

I'm sure we will have another hearing on President Trump's Executive Order on Federal Advisory Committees.

So why we rushed to hold this narrow subcommittee hearing is beyond me, when in just a week or two, we would have more knowledge, could involve more members, and have a broader debate? The only answer I came to is that the majority would have missed the chance to take another partisan swing at this Administration.

Moving forward, I hope that we can take a more holistic approach and allow members the time to review the data before jumping to skewed conclusions.

Thank you, Madam Chair, and I yield back the balance of my time.