

Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Environment
Hearing on “The Mission of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency”
December 7, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

Good morning, Mr. Administrator, we are glad to have you here this morning and we hope you will return often during your tenure. I am disappointed that your appearance must be interrupted by your meeting with the President, but I appreciate your willingness to come back and continue the discussion with our committee.

Before I begin my remarks, I'd like to yield 60 seconds to Rep. Mullin so he can say a few words about a fellow Oklahoman.

As you know, the committee you are appearing before today is charged by the House of Representatives with legislative and oversight responsibility for the bulk of the statutes that the Environmental Protection Agency implements. We may not write the check to EPA, but we decide where the agency's money can best be spent.

It has been almost 10 months since you were sworn in as the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency – an agency that turned 47 years old this past Monday. Today, I would like to begin what will hopefully be a continuing conversation about the agency you run, your vision for it, and what challenges you face.

I am particularly intrigued by your “Back to Basics” concept and your stated intent to return EPA from its freewheeling administrative pursuits to its mission of protecting air, soil, and water - and doing so according to the explicit dictates of Congress. I hope that this view of governing will guide your EPA – rather than efforts to end run Congress in the Federal Register or on the courthouse steps.

I also want to discuss the goals you are establishing for the programs at EPA and the metrics you intend to use to measure their progress. Particularly, I want to know that you have a plan to address staffing issues identified by the agency's Inspector General over the last two decades and I would like to make sure that you are committed to budget transparency, so the public knows how much the agency is spending to implement each of the laws we passed.

I expect that “Back to Basics” is not an abdication of environmental protection, but rather a rededication to mastering the most fundamental aspects of EPA’s mission – whether it’s cleaning up Superfund sites, ensuring that safe drinking water is being piped into people’s homes, or keeping air clean and safe to breathe.

While these jobs may sound mundane, as any football fan will appreciate, they are like the essential “blocking and tackling” techniques that any football team – whether in Norman, Stillwater, Tulsa, or Eugene – must master if they expect to be successful. No matter how brilliant the offensive or defensive strategies may be, if the team cannot nail down the basics, success will be elusive.

The public deserves to be protected and common-sense regulations are important and necessary. However, government solutions should be proportional to the problems they are tasked by congress to solve. I believe the EPA should focus on innovative problem solving and partnerships with the states and the private sector that leverage their resources and expertise.

I want to thank you and your team for your attention to the superfund cleanup in the Portland Harbor. While this area is not in my district, it is in my state and what happens at the Port of Portland has an impact on all Oregonians. You have brought a fresh and welcome approach to this complicated and costly cleanup. Unlike the prior administration, you’ve proven that this administration wants to actually clean up environmental messes, and do the work in a commonsense manner in in close working partnership with local stakeholders. To paraphrase an old song, if you can do it there, you can do it anywhere.

Thank you again for being here to discuss the agency’s mission and your vision for it.

I look forward to working with you and seeing you back here in the future concerning our mutual efforts to protect the public and the environment.