

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change Chairman Paul D. Tonko

Hearing on “The Fiscal Year 2023 EPA Budget”

May 17, 2022

Today we welcome EPA Administrator Michael Regan back to the Committee to examine the President’s Fiscal Year 2023 budget request.

Mr. Administrator, thank you for being here and accommodating the Congressional schedule. We are expecting at least one interruption this morning.

Last year, at our hearing on the FY22 budget request, I said EPA was in need of a reset. Before Administrator Regan joined the Agency, I believe EPA suffered from a shift away from its mission. In those proceeding four years, EPA experienced the loss of 1,000 employees.

After one year, I am very pleased with the change of direction of the Agency under Mr. Regan’s leadership.

This year’s proposal includes \$11.9 billion, a \$2.3 billion increase from the FY22 enacted level.

It supports a wide range of national environmental and public health priorities, including climate change, clean water, chemical safety, and land remediation.

And of course, this request builds upon last year’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which provided historic funding for several key EPA programs.

These funds are already on their way to communities in need, which will result in long overdue investments in our water infrastructure and the replacement of lead service lines.

The BIL will support economic revitalization by remediating brownfield and Superfund sites, and enable American children to take a pollution-free ride to school on zero-emission buses.

These funds are going to improve people’s lives, reducing public health threats while creating jobs. It’s truly a win-win.

But we must remember that the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law was always intended to supplement, not supplant, EPA's annual funding.

The proposal recognizes this by requesting funds for the State Revolving Funds, brownfields program, and other popular and successful programs that received boosts last year.

I also want to recognize that under the Administrator's leadership, EPA has centered its agenda around environmental justice.

I have seen this firsthand. Administrator Regan joined me for a community meeting at the Ezra Prentice Homes in Albany's South End neighborhood.

We heard from community members that in the past their interactions with politicians and environmental regulators were often filled with lip service and empty promises.

I am proud that Administrator Regan, Region II Administrator Garcia, and the Region II staff have continued to actively engage with this community.

And I hope this will result in community-driven solutions to the environmental and public health threats facing the neighborhood.

I can attest that the commitment to environmental justice is not just a line item in the budget. It is a priority— day in and day out— for this EPA, resulting in EPA staff and its leadership reaching into neighborhoods that have not had that opportunity in the past.

Mr. Administrator, I want to thank you for that, and I hope we can continue to work together to get resources into Albany's South End and the many other communities that have suffered historic environmental injustices across the country.

Now that we have invested in our country's environmental infrastructure, it is time to invest in the EPA itself. We cannot continue to expect the Agency to do more with less.

Staffing remains at 1980's levels, even as we are expecting the Agency to effectively administer historic infrastructure funding.

And much of EPA's workforce is eligible for retirement or soon will be.

We need to rebuild the Agency's staff capacity and attract new, talented people to public service.

I was very happy to see the budget request includes over 1,900 new FTEs.

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I truly hope Congress will support this request, which will not only benefit current employees, but also set the Agency up for success in the future.

Finally, it is critical that EPA builds upon the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law by pursuing a complementary and ambitious enforcement and regulatory agenda.

EPA has significant, existing legal authorities to tackle climate and traditional air pollution from power plants and vehicles, keep PFAS chemicals out of commerce, and get the lead out of our water systems more quickly.

I encourage the Agency to develop and adopt ambitious public health protections, starting with heavy-duty vehicles, which is currently under consideration.

Mr. Regan, I thank you again for joining us. I look forward to partnering with you to continue strengthening the EPA's workforce in order to pursue a robust, holistic agenda to protect public health and the environment.