

Opening Statement
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change
Hearing on “The Fiscal Year 2020 EPA Budget”
April 9, 2019

A budget is an expression of priorities, and it should be clear to anyone reading the EPA budget proposal that President Trump does not prioritize public health or the environment.

President Trump’s budget would cut EPA funding by 31 percent – more than any other cabinet level agency. It would eliminate important programs like Beach Grants that help coastal communities like mine ensure that the water is safe to swim in. It also fails to deliver on many of the promises the Administration has made on dangerous toxins like lead and PFAS.

Today we will have an opportunity to measure EPA’s progress over the past year, since this Subcommittee heard from then-Administrator Pruitt on EPA’s budget. That hearing showed bipartisan concern over Administrator Pruitt’s scandals, agency mismanagement and repeated attacks on public health. When Administrator Pruitt resigned, there was hope on both sides of the aisle that the situation at EPA would improve. I was pleased when Mr. Wheeler, then the Acting Administrator, personally committed to make staff available to the Committee for briefings and to testify.

Unfortunately, when I look at the past year, it does not seem that EPA has come very far. In fact, on some issues, it seems the agency is moving backward. With Administrator Wheeler at the helm, EPA has continued to attack science, transparency and public health.

The agency is working to abandon action on climate change and air quality. EPA scrapped the sensible carbon reduction requirements in the Clean Power Plan and replaced it with a scam that is more costly and less protective than no rule at all. EPA also walked away from negotiations with California over the Trump Administration’s rollback of clean car standards, and Administrator Wheeler publicly vowed to revoke California’s waiver to implement stronger vehicle pollution control requirements.

And in a move that makes absolutely no sense, EPA took the first step on a path to sabotage the successful Mercury and Air Toxics Standards. These standards protect communities from dangerous mercury and hazardous air pollution spewed from coal and oil-burning power plants. This action is so bad, even the power industry opposes it.

I also remain concerned that EPA’s implementation of the revised Toxic Substances Control Act is leaving workers, children, low income communities, communities of color and the general public at unacceptable risk. The regulation of asbestos is still heading in the wrong direction. EPA is still allowing new uses of asbestos under the new chemicals program and still ignoring legacy asbestos exposures in its risk assessment. And last month, EPA finalized a rule on methylene chloride that fell far short of what is needed to protect public health and what was promised to this Committee and me.

EPA is also still working to remove important protections in the Risk Management Planning program that might have prevented or reduced the impacts of two recent fires in the Houston area.

I also remain concerned that a lot of troubling activities that began on Administrator Pruitt's watch are still happening. EPA is still hiring industry lobbyists as regulators and still raising red flags on ethics issues.

It is also still shortening comment periods, hiding science from the American public and refusing to provide requested documents to Congress.

Members of both parties in both the House and the Senate are unable to get answers from EPA and this Administration. This is simply unacceptable because Congress must be able to conduct oversight. The agency's refusal to provide this information also, creates the distinct impression that this EPA has something to hide.

The track record of the EPA over the last two years is abysmal. So, Mr. Administrator, I look forward to your testimony and hope that you will begin answering this Committee's questions today.