Opening Statement
Chairman Paul D. Tonko
Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on "The Fiscal Year 2020 EPA Budget"
April 9, 2019

This morning we welcome EPA Administrator Wheeler to the Environment & Climate Change Subcommittee to discuss the President's proposed Fiscal Year 2020 budget for the agency. Mr. Wheeler, thank you for being here.

When your predecessor last testified, we were tough but, in my opinion, fair given his record.

While I am relieved that you have not continued his pattern of indiscretions and ethical violations, I do have serious concerns about the course this agency has plotted under your leadership. And I believe my colleagues on this side of the dais will have questions and disagreements on policies your agency has been putting forth.

The President has proposed a 31% cut to EPA's budget from last year's levels.

The House will certainly reject this budget, which would undermine the agency's ability to fulfill its basic mission of protecting Americans' health and our environment.
I am also concerned and confused that the President's proposal includes significant reductions to programs that the Administration publicly claims are top priorities.

For example, Administrator Wheeler has called unsafe drinking water the greatest environmental threat, but the budget fails to reflect that sentiment.

Bipartisan legislation that originated in this Committee last year reauthorized funding for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund at $1.3 billion in FY20. But President Trump's request is far less than even last year's level.

The committee has recognized the need to protect our drinking water. With that in mind, I hope to receive updates on the lead service line replacement grant program, a Lead and Copper Rule revision rulemaking, which was expected in February, and the regulatory determination for PFAS, which your agency has said will happen this year.

EPA is not acting urgently or comprehensively enough to address serious risks to Americans that go beyond our drinking water. Administrative actions have moved through the agency that will directly undermine protections for clean air and chemical safety. But perhaps the clearest example is the agency's climate change agenda.

The Administration has sought to undo modest and achievable climate protections including gutting the Clean Power Plan and vehicle emission standards. The Administrator's recent remark that climate is not a very urgent threat is not supported by science, and ignores the countless families losing their homes to hurricanes, flooding and wildfires. We are spending billions of dollars each year responding to natural disasters, and we know that climate pollution emitted

today will stay in the atmosphere for decades.

There is no excuse for sitting on our hands. We need to be doing much more to reign in emissions, and right now.

There are many meaningful and noncontroversial steps EPA could take on this front. One easy example is to strengthen the popular, consumer-friendly Energy Star program.
It is my understanding that Mr. Wheeler has not been directly involved with this program, but I am informed that actual spending on the program is significantly less than what Congress has directed in recent years. That's not how this is supposed to work.

This program is critically important to American consumers and manufacturers, so I hope this concern will be raised with the appropriate people at EPA. Congress does expect our spending directions to be followed.

In addition to advancing the mission of the agency to safeguard public health, I also believe the Administrator has a responsibility to protect the health of the institution.

And yet we continue to see employees leave—including engineers and scientists with decades of experience and knowledge. These dedicated public servants are being replaced at much lower rates.

We are seeing a lax approach to enforcement of existing laws. Enforcement actions against polluters have reached a 25-year low under this Administration. The agency has stressed allowing polluters to self-report violations, all while conducting fewer inspections to catch them if they are breaking the law. That's not just taking the cop off the beat, it's asking the lawbreakers to come down to the station at their own convenience.

We are also seeing a systematic devaluing of science by the agency's leadership. "Robust science" was included as a major goal in the budget, but science funding was recommended for a 45% proposed cut.

When EPA ignores science in its decision-making, we are essentially ensuring that Americans will be put in unnecessary danger. Americans will get sicker, and they will die sooner. It is critical that public health rules be grounded in robust science. But instead, we are witnessing the continued dismissal, politicization, and suppression of science at the agency.

Finally, more must be done to improve transparency. When we ask for documents or urge EPA to be more transparent or responsive, we are not trying to set up a "gotcha." We do it because it is our job to conduct oversight of the agency on behalf of the American people—the people we are all charged with serving and the people this agency is charged with protecting.

I hope this morning that Administrator Wheeler will renew and honor his commitment to deliver thorough and timely responses to our requests. Mr. Wheeler, thank you again for joining us. I look forward to your testimony.

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