

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement
of
Subcommittee on Environment Ranking Member Paul Tonko
The Fiscal Year 2019 Environmental Protection Agency Budget
April 26, 2018

We are here today to discuss EPA's budget for Fiscal Year 2019. The President has called for a nearly 30 percent cut at EPA, which would severely impair the agency's ability to fulfill its mission to safeguard public health and our environment.

We know all too well the costs of failing that mission, of the pain of communities, of children and families who suffer illness resulting from pollution in their air and water.

So yes, I am concerned that EPA is increasingly allowing polluters to set the agenda and threaten public health with minimal accountability.

Under Administrator Pruitt, commonsense public health and environmental protections are being slated for elimination with no regard for scientific evidence and little justification beyond the wishes of regulated entities.

These actions include reopening clean car standards without any mention of health or pollution, continuing to repeal the Clean Power Plan and dismissing the science of climate change, implementing TSCA reform that ignores bipartisan Congressional intent, and a number of attempts to undermine the Clean Air Act.

I expect the courts will agree that many, if not all, of these actions are unjustified.

In addition, I am troubled by the dismissal of science by the agency's political leadership.

Hundreds of scientists have left EPA with no apparent plan to replace them. Expertise on the Science Advisory Boards has been eroded. And the recently proposed rule to undermine the use of science in rulemakings will severely limit the agency's ability to safeguard public health.

I know many career employees at EPA simply want to work hard to ensure the air we breathe is clean and the water we drink is safe. To them, I say thank you.

But the agency's political leadership is pursuing a different agenda. And the mounting evidence of serious ethics violations and credible investigations at the highest levels cannot go unscrutinized.

Mr. Chairman, I value this Subcommittee's bipartisan record. There are times that we disagree, but we have worked through tough issues together and are often able to find bipartisan balance.

I know there are those in the Majority who support rollbacks of EPA rules. But all of us should be troubled by the numerous reports of misuse of taxpayer dollars and apparent conflicts of interest that have made the Administrator a frequent subject of investigation.

I am of course referring to the Administrator's pattern of wasteful spending on luxury travel, personal security, and office upgrades. To say nothing of his well-documented sweetheart rental from a lobbyist with business before EPA and huge unapproved raises for top political staff, among others.

Perhaps most concerning have been the reports of retaliation against employees, both career and political, that have dared to question Administrator Pruitt's most troubling abuses and expenditures.

And in almost all cases, the more we have learned, the worse they get.

At this point, we must ask if the Inspector General will have the resources needed to investigate the Administrator's seemingly endless misconduct.

At the heart of all these issues is an apparent pattern of an Administrator refusing accountability and putting personal and special interests ahead of the American people.

I would ask my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to imagine if a Democrat acted in this manner. Would you stand for it? I think the answer is clear— you would not.

My colleagues and I may disagree about many of the policy decisions coming out of this EPA. But one thing I hope we can agree on is that we cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the reports of this Administrator's fiscal mismanagement and abuse of his position.

Mr. Administrator, the evidence is clear: you have failed as a steward of American taxpayer dollars and our environment.

You claim to believe in the mission of the EPA, but your actions, including your mistreatment of EPA's dedicated career staff, tell a very different story.

Evidence from your time in state government should have made this obvious, but only in recent weeks have we come to fully understand the extent of your political ambitions, your tendency to abuse your position for personal gain and to advance the agendas of your political benefactors, and what appears to be a propensity for graft.

But most importantly, your conduct as Administrator has demonstrated a lack of respect for American taxpayers and the agency you were appointed to lead, and has affirmed the regrettable but inevitable conclusion that you were never fit for this job.

And your refusal to provide any serious transparency, accept any accountability, or show even the slightest contrition is inexcusable.

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Mr. Chairman, no one is above the law. Congress must hold this Administrator accountable on behalf of the American people. I hope our Committee can continue to investigate and bring the truth of these important issues to light in a bipartisan manner. I yield back.