

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.

Hearing on “Exposing EPA Efforts To Limit Chemicals Needed For Life-Saving Medical Devices And Other Essential Products”

October 18, 2023

It is now day 16 of the House being paralyzed without a Speaker, and we are 30 days away from another potential government shutdown. This hearing comes at a time when House Republicans’ dysfunction is hurting the American people, weakening our economy, and undermining our national security.

All year, House Republicans have caved to the extreme elements in their party who have no interest in governing. They have forced severe cuts to critical federal programs in spite of a funding agreement between the former Speaker and President Biden. And they came dangerously close to a government shutdown that would have cost our national economy upwards of \$13 billion a week and forced our troops to work without pay.

I just think the American people deserve better. Democrats have repeatedly tried to stop this chaos from hurting everyday Americans, but it's long past time for House Republicans to reject the extremists in their party. We should be working together to lower costs for American families and to grow our economy and the middle-class. It is time for the chaos and dysfunction to end.

Unfortunately, Committee Republicans are once again rejecting bipartisanship in an effort to continue their partisan attacks against the EPA. They criticize the agency for simply following the law and fulfilling its mission of protecting Americans’ health and the environment.

Republicans are simply wrong when they claim that EPA protections hurt jobs and the economy. This is nothing but a false narrative designed to further their polluters over people agenda. And, in fact, it’s just the opposite. History has shown that EPA’s protections yield more benefits for Americans than any other agency and its benefits outweigh its costs by more than 13 to one.

EPA has made significant strides in reducing pollution and exposure to toxic contaminants over the last 50 years while our nation’s economy has continued to grow. And yet, Committee Republicans continue to do the bidding of their polluter friends, even now attacking environmental laws that they themselves supported.

Committee Republicans are attacking the updates we made to the Toxic Substances Control Act, or TSCA, six years ago. The Frank R. Lautenberg Chemical Safety for the 21st Century Act strengthened the 40-year-old law by ensuring that EPA determines a chemical is

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safe before it is put on the market. It also required that safety determinations be based solely on health and environmental risks. This is commonsense, and that's why it passed out of this Committee and became law with overwhelming bipartisan support. But again, House Republicans are not the same as they were six years ago. Earlier this year, they tried to gut these reforms and would once again allow chemicals onto the market without a determination of safety. And that's putting American lives at risk.

Republicans are also attacking an EPA proposal to curb ethylene oxide or EtO pollution, a carcinogenic gas used to sterilize products like medical equipment. Workers and residents in the communities around commercial sterilization facilities have tremendously high cancer risks. EPA has worked closely with its federal partners on this proposal to reduce exposure to EtO while maintaining the integrity of the supply chain. This will help ensure that patients and providers have continued access to the sterile devices they need. But again, these Republican attacks are putting the lives of more than 14 million people at risk. These people live within five miles of an EtO-emitting facility and are at risk of various cancers of the blood and breast cancer.

Republicans also want to undercut protections to expedite review of PFAS, which would allow potentially dangerous chemicals into the homes of millions of Americans. It stands in stark contrast to the PFAS Action Act that the House passed last Congress under Democratic leadership, which would have protected our air, land, and water from harmful PFAS contamination. It is bad enough that Republicans are trying to undermine public health and environmental protection at every turn, but they have also proposed dangerous cuts to EPA funding that helps the agency carry out these vital programs.

Today, EPA is providing a robust federal framework to review and appropriately control potentially dangerous chemicals to prevent harmful exposures and protect our environment. These protections are helping to drive innovation, grow our economy, and protect public health all at the same time. It's time for Republicans to stop pushing the industry line and work with Democrats to start supporting safeguards that benefit all Americans.

I yield back the balance of my time.