

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Environment Ranking Member Paul D. Tonko

Hearing on “Short-Circuiting Progress: How the Clean Air Act Impacts Building Necessary”

June 11, 2025

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For almost as long as I have served on this Committee, Republicans have tried and failed to enact the proposals before us today. These bills do not represent new and innovative solutions specifically tailored to meet our current policy challenges, including addressing growing electricity demand.

They are the same tired ideas that suggest Americans should expect to live with unsafe air quality if the rules necessary to protect them would cut into polluters’ profits. I am certain that Members from both sides of the aisle will celebrate the success of the Clean Air Act, which has resulted in significant reductions in air pollution while our economy has grown.

But the majority tends to believe that this is evidence that the job is done, and we should dramatically change the law. I, on the other hand, take the exact opposite lesson. The Clean Air Act is working, and there is still considerable work for the law to do.

The American Lung Association’s 2025 “State of the Air” report found that even after five decades of the Clean Air Act, 46% of Americans— more than 156 million people— are living in places with unhealthy levels of ozone or particle pollution, two of the pollutants addressed by the National Ambient Air Quality Standards, or NAAQS.

Now, as I said, the proposals before us today are not new. But there is some new and important context for us to discuss. First, three weeks ago, House Republicans passed their Big, Ugly Bill, which according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office will result in 16 million Americans losing their health care.

The proposals today add insult to injury, pushing us towards a future where hospitals, already under financial pressure, will have to deal with more cases of asthma, COPD, and other health consequences of increased air pollution affecting millions more uninsured Americans. Second, the Trump Administration intends to attempt to roll back the 2024 standard for fine particulate matter.

EPA previously estimated that this standard will result in \$46 billion in net benefits in 2032, including 4,500 avoided premature deaths, 800,000 avoided asthma attacks, and nearly 300,000 avoided missed days of work each year. The 2024 standard for fine particulate matter is

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expected to provide such significant benefits to the American people because NAAQS are required by law to be protective of our health without consideration of costs.

But the proposals before us today would drastically weaken the process to set standards based on the latest science. They would double the amount of time between reviews of standards and inject cost considerations and attainability into the standard setting process.

I also find it unfortunate that the majority's hearing title would lead us to believe that the Clean Air Act is stifling American innovation. And yet, House Republicans continue to sit on their hands while the Trump Administration dismantles all the conditions that have historically made the United States an engine for innovation.

President Trump is proposing devastating funding cuts to the Federal research enterprise— NSF, NIH, NOAA, and other critical research agencies. This will ensure that America fails to train the next generation of great scientists, engineers, and other innovators, who rely on Federal dollars to achieve their advanced degrees and conduct cutting-edge research.

DOE's industrial programs, NIST's Manufacturing Extension Partnership, and other programs that American manufacturers rely upon are also under threat. The Trump Administration has caused an uncertain and unstable investment environment with its unstrategic and ever-changing tariff policies, and Republicans have demonstrated a willingness to jeopardize private sector investments by seeking to abruptly end energy tax incentives.

Even Federal contracts are no longer worth the paper they are printed on following the arbitrary and unlawful terminations of many finalized agreements. These actions are having a chilling effect on private sector investment, the American research community, and other entities that are critical to the future competitiveness of our economy.

These are not the actions of a government that is serious about fostering innovation. But rather than criticize the Trump Administration, we are back to undermining environmental protections and trying to convince Americans that we simply cannot afford safe, healthy air.

I am certain there is evidence going back decades of industry claiming each and every past NAAQS standard has been unachievable or would cause irrevocable economic harm. But the sky has never fallen.

The Clean Air Act has worked effectively as intended, and it continues to protect Americans' health while enabling economic growth. These goals are not at odds. But unfortunately, the proposals we are examining today do not share that view.

With that, I yield back.