

OPENING STATEMENT
Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Subcommittee on Environment
Subcommittee on Oversight
“Examining the Scientific and Operational Integrity of EPA’s IRIS Program”
September 6, 2017

Mr. Chairman, I am disappointed, but I am not surprised, that we are holding this hearing today. Sadly, I have had to make this statement too many times in the last four years. How can we, in good conscience, title this hearing as an examination of the scientific and operational integrity of EPA’s IRIS program, when there is no one from EPA here to testify? We cannot.

How do we conduct the necessary oversight of this program, when the Government Accountability Office (GAO) is not present to answer questions about their recent review of IRIS? We do not.

How are we serving the best interests of our constituents, and of all Americans, when the National Academies of Sciences is not present to discuss their report upon which the last three years’ worth of reforms to IRIS were based upon? We are not.

How can we have an honest discussion about this program while ignoring the key entities that have reviewed it and studied its recent improvements? We simply can’t.

I would also note that just last week the EPA’s independent Science Advisory Board (SAB) sent a letter to EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt praising the progress the IRIS program has made. The letter said, in part – and I quote: “The Board commends the Agency for making such significant improvements over a short period of time. We are optimistic that the restructured IRIS program will strengthen the scientific foundations of risk assessment and protect the health and safety of the American public.” But we’re not hearing from the SAB either. Instead, the Majority has invited two industry scientists to voice their criticisms of IRIS.

Let me be clear, industry perspectives should not be excluded from scientific discussions on environmental issues at the EPA – and they are not now, nor have they ever been. The current membership of EPA’s Science Advisory Board, for instance, includes representatives from the Dow Chemical Company, Procter & Gamble, and Exxon Mobil. However, I am concerned that industry, the leadership of this Committee, and now this Administration, are seeking to let industry drive the science upon which critical decisions about protecting the public’s health and the environment are made. The current criticisms of the EPA’s IRIS program by industry highlight that point. We have seen this tactic used by industry before and I am sure we will see it repeated in the future.

Mr. Chairman, not only can we do better, we must do better. The American people deserve a Congress that is working for them, and with them, not against them, and certainly not for the interests of wealthy polluting industries. I hope that one day soon our Committee will be a forum

for a balanced discussion of the critical issues under our jurisdiction. Unfortunately, today's hearing falls well short of that mark.

One last point. The response from the Majority to my statement may be that Minority Members are permitted to invite one witness to these hearings and that we could have invited anyone we wanted to, such as a representative of the EPA, the SAB, GAO or the National Academies. My response to that, Mr. Chairman is that I don't believe it is the job of the Minority to do the Majority's job for them. It is clear that all of those entities should be represented at today's hearing, not just the single witness allocated to the Minority. If we are serious about conducting credible oversight of IRIS, I would hope that the Majority will commit to a follow-up hearing so that those voices can be heard.

Thank you. I yield back.