

## **OPENING STATEMENT**

Congressman Paul Tonko

November 17, 2011

Hearing on EPA Research and Laboratories

“Fostering Quality Science at EPA: The Need for Common Sense Reform”

U.S. House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Subcommittee on Energy and Environment

Mr. Miller wanted to be here at the start of this hearing but had a scheduling conflict, and will join us later. I want to thank Chairman Harris for holding a hearing to examine the ability of EPA’s research enterprise to meet the agency’s mission to protect public health and the environment. Scientific research, knowledge, and technical information are fundamental to EPA’s mission and inform its standard-setting, regulatory, compliance, and enforcement functions. The agency’s scientific performance is particularly important as complex environmental issues emerge and evolve. And it is science, not partisan politics, which should guide their resolution. Unfortunately, controversy continues to surround many of the agency’s areas of responsibility. Let me be clear, there may be some legitimate concerns related to EPA’s research enterprise, but EPA is not the demonic agency that the Republican Majority has made it out to be this Congress.

This hearing is the beginning of a real opportunity to become informed about structural and substantive concerns related to EPA’s research activities. I hope that my Republican counterparts are really interested in reform that will lead to better research to enhance public health and protect the environment.

I do not believe anyone would disagree that we should always adhere to best practices, transparency, and integrity in all of our work. That is why in 2008, the Ranking Member of this Subcommittee, Mr. Miller, requested the GAO to take a look at the independent evaluations that have been done over the past 20 years and that identified problems with the EPA’s 35 laboratories’ operations and management. In an atmosphere of constrained budgets, it is imperative that, with EPA’s increasing need to understand complex environmental problems, they are positioned to formulate sound environmental protection policies.

These independent evaluations have called for improved planning, coordination, and leadership, as well as consolidation of laboratories. The EPA operates 35 laboratories to provide the scientific foundation for its mission. When it was established in 1970, EPA inherited 42 laboratories from programs in various federal departments. EPA has since closed or consolidated some laboratories and created new ones to support its core mission. Of course, closing facilities always has an impact on the surrounding community. That impact could perhaps be amplified given the current state of the economy and we must be mindful of such outcomes. Despite this, it is still our responsibility to explore all options for productive and effective cost-savings.

Independent evaluations and the GAO have highlighted the need for the EPA to develop a coordinated planning process for its scientific activities and improve agency-wide research planning, among many other suggestions. It is important to note that these issues are not new under the current Administration – they span the activities and inactivity of several Administrations. Don’t be fooled by the rhetoric on the “right” that the Obama Administration

was the impetus of the concerns expressed here. These concerns did not appear overnight or in just the past three years. They will need to be corrected over time. And any reorganization will need to be done in an orderly, well thought-out manner; with much oversight and input.

In recent years, the IG has put forward many recommendations to improve the ORD that appear to have been embraced by the agency. Overall, the IG has found that the EPA ORD peer review process adequately produces objective scientific reviews. As we have said time and time again in this Committee, good policy and decisions begins with good science. I am sure there is room for improvement and I hope we can work together to identify opportunities to make EPA more effective in protecting the public and the environment.

Today, we are presented with the perfect opportunity to show American taxpayers that not every issue needs to be polarizing or politicized. It's an opportunity for Congress to be productive and objective. It's also an opportunity to put our differences aside and have meaningful conversations and exchanges of ideas. We need to build upon EPA's scientific legacy and ensure that we continue to improve our shared environment, including for future generations.

Chairman Harris, we look forward to working with you in the months ahead. I yield back.