

OPENING STATEMENT

Ranking Member Brad Miller

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Hearing on the Clean Air Act

“Quality Science for Quality Act”

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

Subcommittee on Energy and Environment

I want to thank Chairman Harris for holding a hearing to discuss the science underpinning the 40 year old landmark legislation, the Clean Air Act. While I disagree with some of the opinions of my colleagues and the witnesses, I understand the timing and motivations behind this hearing. As we look forward to the EPA issuing new and updated pollution regulations, it is worth reminding ourselves of what they are based on and what we get out of them. In that regard, the Clean Air Act’s history of protecting public health speaks for itself.

In the four decades since it was signed, the Clean Air Act has saved hundreds of thousands of lives. Even in its first 20 years - as emissions reductions were just beginning - EPA figures show that the Clean Air Act prevented more than 200,000 premature deaths and almost 700,000 cases of chronic bronchitis.

And these benefits to the public will continue to grow. The EPA projects that, by 2020, the Clean Air Act will prevent roughly 230,000 deaths, 200,000 cases of heart disease, and 2.4 million asthma flare-ups every year. These will have a real economic effect by keeping children and adults out of the hospital and saving the nation from 22.4 million missed school and work days per year, providing upwards of \$2 trillion in economic benefits by 2020. These benefits would far exceed the original costs by 30 to 1. That’s not a bad investment by any standard.

The Clean Air Act is hardly the economy-killer that so many claim. Over the last 20 years, while emissions of the six principal air pollutants were reduced by an additional 41 percent, the nation’s Gross Domestic Product has increased by more than 64 percent. And, we not only got cleaner air, but entirely new technology sectors to boot. In fact, GDP has risen by more than 200 percent since the Act was signed 40 years ago, and this is in spite of the doomsday prophecies of widespread economic disruption and industrial collapse that some said would result from environmental regulations. These claims have been proven wrong time and again, and we should expect to look back and regard the alarmism of today as no different.

To be fair, the blame for misguiding the public on the costs and benefits of regulations cannot be laid solely at the feet of industry that, in the end, exists to turn a profit. In fact, “industry” is hardly uniform in its regard for environmental regulations, with many industrial stakeholders clearly advocating in favor of the new regulations. It depends on how they have invested. And, even those on the losing end of EPA’s regulations are often complaining about the process or timeline, knowing that the eventual regulation will be the same.

Unfortunately, there is a more troubling force at play here as politicians have discovered the distinct political value of vilifying the EPA. To them, there is no middle ground, and no room for negotiation or compromise with this “rogue agency”. In politicizing the issue – sometimes far beyond the comfort level of the industries they profess to champion - there also seems to be no limit to the hysterics. In a recent hearing on the EPA’s transport rule before this Committee, a witness actually stated that the rule will “jeopardize the lives of our most medically fragile citizens”.

Demonizing environmental safeguards and the EPA by making specious claims that regulations kill jobs – and even people - while completely ignoring the proven positive effects they have on public health and the economy, is another cynical ploy to get Americans to vote against their own self-interest.

Thankfully, poll after poll shows that the public believes that EPA should protect their right to clean air and water more than they believe that pollution is the price they must pay for economic security.

In this Congress, it seems we have seen every assault possible on environmental protections such as the Clean Air Act, taking 136 anti-environmental votes in the House, thus far. Before the recess, the House passed the so-called TRAIN Act, a piece of legislation that would derail efforts to curb emissions of dangerous pollutants such as soot, mercury, dioxins and acid gases. Of course, nobody would argue against having “transparency” in our regulatory processes, but that is not really what these bills are about. They are about politics first, and buying time for polluters who must otherwise be dragged kicking-and-screaming into environmental compliance, while more forward-looking firms are deprived of making a return on their investments in cleaner technology.

Efforts such as the TRAIN Act and the paralysis-by-analysis it would impose are themselves anything but transparent or comprehensive. It adds another layer of bureaucracy, essentially for the purpose of weighing industry’s cost of compliance, without considering the benefits for public health and the creation of new jobs. It also removes any provision to ensure that such safeguards will ever take effect, delaying them indefinitely. It is designed to ignore the overwhelming evidence that saving Americans’ lives is far cheaper than saving polluters’ dollars.

No regulatory process is ever going to make everyone happy because someone must always change, but we should certainly look for ways to make the processes more efficient and transparent. Instead of making doomsday claims that never hold up and scaring the American public into forgoing their own rights to a cleaner environment, we need to trust in the EPA’s reliable, established scientific processes for characterizing the effects of emissions on public health and evaluating the costs and benefits of new technologies. We should acknowledge that

we did not get 40 years of dramatic pollution reductions with strong economic growth because EPA's scientific processes are not tried and true. Put simply, they work.

And speaking of process, I am disappointed that we do not have before us an EPA witness nor one from the Science Advisory Board. If we're going to talk about them, they out to be here to defend themselves. That's just fundamental fairness.

Quoting Republican President Nixon, who first signed into law the 1970 Clean Air Act, "I think that 1970 will be known as the year of the beginning, in which we really began to move on the problems of clean air and clean water and open spaces for the future generations of America".

Although significant progress has been made in the past 40 years, it is our job now to build upon this legacy and ensure that we continue to improve our environmental quality while fostering a strong economy. This is not science fiction; it is our history. In the U.S. a healthy environment and strong economy are not mutually exclusive. Stricter pollutions limits force us to push the envelope of scientific innovation and create new technologies. And, as it has been proven many times over, improved worker productivity, increased agricultural yield, reduction in mortality and illness, and other economic and public health benefits far outweigh the costs of compliance.

Thank you, and I yield back.