

Opening Statement
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change
Hearing on “The Fiscal Year 2021 EPA Budget”
February 27, 2020

Last year, four former EPA Administrators testified before our Committee, criticizing this EPA for failing to meet its essential, lifesaving mission. Christine Todd Whitman, a Republican former Administrator and New Jersey Governor testified that ‘the EPA currently, on the track that it’s on, is endangering public health and the health of the environment.’

I agree with that grave assessment. Instead of protecting public health and the environment, this EPA is putting them at greater risk. As former Administrator Gina McCarthy said at that hearing, EPA’s political leadership needs to ‘step up and do their jobs.’

Unfortunately, it is clear with this budget request that EPA’s political leadership is continuing on this dangerous track.

We are at a critical time for environmental protection. The impacts of climate change are already here, affecting communities across the nation and the world. PFAS and other emerging contaminants are showing up in our drinking water, air and soil. Our water infrastructure is crumbling, and too many communities are struggling with lead contamination.

We cannot afford to ignore these threats, but that is exactly what the Trump EPA’s budget request does.

At a time when the backlog for Superfund cleanups is the longest it’s ever been, we can’t afford to cut Superfund funding. Yet this budget would cut it by \$112 million.

When communities are struggling to get lead out of their drinking water, we can’t afford to cut assistance for the drinking water State Revolving Funds. But this budget would cut that funding by \$262 million.

When sea level rise and toxic red tides threaten coastal communities, we cannot afford to cut BEACH grants. But this budget would eliminate them entirely.

When PFAS contamination is being discovered in more and more communities all the time, we can’t afford to gut the research funding or EPA staff working to develop solutions. Nevertheless, this budget would slash science and technology funding, toxics risk reviews and drinking water programs.

These cuts, like so much of what we have seen from this EPA, would harm public health and the environment, just as the former Administrators predicted. Fortunately, Congress holds the power

to decide how much funding these important programs will actually receive, and we will work to protect these programs and the communities they serve.

A budget speaks to the priorities of the Administration proposing it. This Administration is clearly shouting that it doesn't care about safe drinking water. It has no interest in protecting people from toxic chemicals in their products or their water. It feels no urgency to keep PFAS out of our air, land water or bodies. And it has no intention of dealing with the climate crisis.

This budget proposal simply does not allow the EPA to fulfill its mission to the American people, and therefore it is a proposal that we must reject. We simply cannot follow the dangerous course this Administration is trying to take us down. Instead, House Democrats are taking action to protect public health for vulnerable populations, for environmental justice communities and for future generations.

With the CLEAN Future Act, my colleagues and I have outlined aggressive action to address climate change and other pollution. With the LIFT America Act and the Moving Forward Framework, we have offered infrastructure solutions that invest in protecting public health while also strengthening our economy and creating good paying jobs. With the PFAS Action Act, we have set a course to eliminate the threat of PFAS chemicals.

Instead of weakening coal ash regulations, we would strengthen them. Instead of weakening vehicle emissions standards, we would strengthen them. Instead of leaving lead service lines in the ground, we would speed replacements. Instead of wasting time on unnecessary red tape before setting a drinking water standard for PFAS, we would require a protective standard quickly.

This is a better path forward to combating climate change and protecting public health and the environment.

In closing, I return to the testimony of Former Republican Administrator Whitman, who stated last year that she was 'deeply concerned that five decades of environmental progress are at risk because of the attitude and approach of the current administration.'

I share that concern. Like so much of what we have seen from this administration, this budget would put the climate, our air, our drinking water, our land, our communities and our planet at greater risk. This is not a path we can afford to go down.