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Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on "H.R. 4255, the Accountability in Grants Act of 2012"
Subcommittee on Energy and Power
September 11, 2012

Today the Subcommittee examines a bill entitled the Accountability in Grants Act of 2012, which would repeal EPA's authority to award grants under the Clean Air Act for international work to address air pollution, climate change, and other global environmental problems.

This bill proves that poor oversight leads to dumb legislation.

Last summer, Committee Republicans launched an investigation into EPA's longstanding practice of awarding grants for work abroad. They released a staff report saying that President Obama had doled out millions of dollars to foreign recipients.

But this report was seriously flawed. Half of the grants they criticized President Obama for awarding actually started under the George W. Bush Administration.

So I wrote to Chairman Upton and Chairman Whitfield and explained that their report was incorrect. I asked them to retract the report until they reviewed the facts more carefully. They ignored my letter.

EPA then provided the Committee with a comprehensive list of 500 grants awarded in the last ten years for projects with an international component. The Republicans have used this data to argue that the Obama Administration has increased grant funding for foreign projects.

In fact, almost half of these grants went to U.S.-based universities and organizations, not foreign recipients. And many had only the most minor international connection.

EPA calls a grant "international" if the grantee spends any money abroad at all, even if it is just to fly to a conference in a different country to get the perspectives of international experts. One grant on the list went to the University of Pittsburgh for research into air pollution in New York City.

EPA Administrator Jackson explained this to the Committee last February. She testified that "very little" of the money categorized as international actually went abroad.

After that hearing, I again sent a letter to Chairman Whitfield, raising concerns about how the Committee Republicans were portraying EPA's international grant-making activities. Again, we did not receive a response.

So we decided to ask EPA to tell us how much money the grantees actually spent abroad. Based on that data, we found that EPA grantees have spent less abroad on average under the Obama Administration than they did during the last year of the Bush Administration. I'd like to introduce into the record a supplemental memo that explains the reality of EPA's international grants program.

This hearing and the bill we are considering are a good illustration of what's wrong with the Committee. Facts don't seem to matter anymore.

There's another problem with this bill: its entire premise is that U.S. engagement with the rest of the world on environmental issues is wrong.

The United States doesn't exist in a bubble. Pollution doesn't respect national borders and doesn't need a passport. That's why sustained U.S. international engagement by EPA and other federal agencies is essential.

When EPA proposes to crack down on U.S. emissions of greenhouse gasses, Republicans on the Committee say that unilateral climate change harms U.S. competitiveness. They say they want an international solution.

But when EPA makes grants to build global support for reducing emissions of methane or black carbon, which contribute to climate change, the same members attack EPA for spending U.S. funds abroad.

It's a cynical Catch 22. Republicans complain if EPA acts without international support, and they complain again if EPA spends any funds to build international support.

I had disagreements with the policies of the last Bush Administration, but I always admired his commitment to alleviating poverty and suffering around the world. It's a shame that this sense of compassion seems to have vanished.

Committee Republicans ridicule "Breathe Easy, Jakarta" for its name but ignore that this modest $15,000 grant will help the Indonesian city transition away from leaded gasoline. They ignore the benefit of providing funding for cleaner cookstoves, so that poor women and children in Haiti and other developing countries aren't exposed to deadly indoor air pollution.

One of America's greatest strengths is our generosity to those in need. Sadly, we seem to regard compassion to the needy as a weakness not a virtue in this Committee.