

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS
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House of Representatives
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Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on “The American Energy Initiative – EPA Greenhouse Gas Regulations”
Subcommittee on Energy and Power
June 29, 2012

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I’m sorry to hear the statement about people losing their jobs in the coal industry. I know that is very difficult for those people and their families, but I would respectfully submit that if they’re losing their jobs, it’s not because of regulation. It’s primarily because they’re not able to compete in the marketplace where natural gas is cheaper.

Today’s hearing continues the 18-month Republican attack on the Clean Air Act, EPA regulations, and the science that informs our understanding of the effects of air pollution.

The House Republicans have made this the most anti-environmental House in history. To date, the Republicans have voted more than 270 times on the House floor to weaken long-standing public health and environmental laws, block environmental regulations, defund environmental protections, and oppose clean energy.

The most shameful aspect of this anti-environment campaign is the denial of science. There is no way to govern responsibly if you refuse to accept the findings of the National Academy of Sciences and the rest of the scientific community. Yet that is what is happening in this Committee.

Here’s what one of the world’s preeminent science journals, Nature, wrote about this Committee’s votes to deny the existence of climate change:

It is hard to escape the conclusion that the U.S. Congress has entered the intellectual wilderness, a sad state of affairs in a country that has led the world in many scientific arenas for so long. . . . Misinformation was presented as fact, truth was twisted and nobody showed any inclination to listen to scientists, let alone learn from them. It has been an embarrassing display, not just for the Republican Party but also for Congress.

This willful blindness may enrich oil companies and other big polluters, but it is reckless and it is dangerous. I would submit that the coal industry is going to suffer even more, because

they're not willing to work with us to try to find a way to make coal a viable option in our energy portfolio by figuring out the technology to remove the carbon emissions.

All you need to do, if you doubt my concerns about paying attention to science, is just turn on the news. Wildfires are burning hundreds of homes in Colorado. Rains are flooding Florida. These extreme weather events will become more common as we deny the science and pretend we can ignore the laws of nature.

Earlier this week, the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals provided a refreshing dose of reality. In a unanimous decision, which included Reagan-appointed Chief Judge Sentelle, the panel dismissed all challenges to EPA's endangerment finding, tailpipe standards for greenhouse gases, and tailoring rule.

House Republicans have said over and over again that EPA is acting without congressional authorization. Here's what the court said about that: EPA's interpretation of the governing Clean Air Act provisions is "unambiguously correct."

This decision was a huge victory for science. The court dismissed every challenge to the adequacy of the scientific record supporting the finding that greenhouse gases endanger public health and the environment.

The court found that an "ocean of evidence" supported EPA's findings. And it held that EPA was right to rely on the work of the National Academy of Sciences and other authoritative bodies, writing: "This is how science works. EPA is not required to re-prove the existence of the atom."

Today, we will hear from Gina McCarthy, who runs the air program at EPA. As the court recognized, she and her agency are acting responsibly. They are listening to the scientific experts and crafting responsible policies.

Yet all this Committee tries to do is throw sand in the gears. Our record is a deplorable one of denial and obstructionism.

The question we should be asking is not what we can do to stop reasonable regulations, but how we can help the families whose homes are being burned in Colorado Springs and flooded in Saint Petersburg, and how we can help the families who are losing jobs in the coal industry, because that industry is refusing to recognize reality.