

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on “The American Energy Initiative –
National Standards for Fine Particulate Matter”
Subcommittee on Energy and Power
June 28, 2012

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 troubling 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, and the result is a national embarrassment.

Here’s what one of the world’s preeminent science journals, Nature, wrote about what is happening in this Committee and the House of Representatives:

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. . . . At a subcommittee hearing . . . anger and distrust were directed at scientists and respected scientific societies. 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. . . .

Those comments were about votes in the Committee that denied the existence of climate change.

Today, the subject is the harmful health effects of fine particulate matter, but the tactic is the same: ignore the scientific experts and dispute the overwhelming scientific evidence of the risk to human health.

Today we will hear from the majority's witnesses that there are "major questions about EPA's forecast of serious health effects" related to particulate matter. We will also hear that "the health benefits of the proposed PM NAAQS are also far more uncertain than EPA admits." Members of this Committee will likely question whether strengthening the current fine particulate standard would have any significant benefits for public health.

These claims are simply not supported by the overwhelming scientific consensus. In 2005, this Committee heard the following statement:

Of the many air pollutants regulated by EPA, fine particle pollution is perhaps the greatest threat to public health. Hundreds of studies in the peer-reviewed literature have found that these microscopic particles can reach the deepest regions of the lungs. Exposure to fine particles is associated with premature death, as well as asthma attacks, chronic bronchitis, decreased lung function, and respiratory disease. Exposure is also associated with aggravation of heart and lung disease, leading to increased hospitalizations, emergency room and doctor visits, and use of medication.

That was a statement by Jeff Holmstead, the Assistant Administrator for Air, testifying on behalf of the Bush EPA.

Scientists and medical experts tell us that there are significant health effects from fine particulates at levels below the current ambient air quality standards. It is our job to listen to them and act responsibly to protect the public from these risks.

I regret that we will not be fulfilling our fundamental obligation to be responsible legislators today.