

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS
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Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
“Environmental Regulations, the Economy, and Jobs”
Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy
February 15, 2011

Today’s hearing is entitled “Environmental Regulations, the Economy, and Jobs.” I think this is a worthy topic for discussion – if we do it right. Unfortunately, I am concerned that today’s hearing may simply be a platform for complaints about our landmark laws designed to protect taxpayers and the public health. We’ll hear complaints about Superfund, the Resources Conservation and Recovery Act, and the Toxic Substances Control Act. And we’ll hear complaints about laws outside of this subcommittee’s jurisdiction like the Clean Air Act.

The environmental laws we will discuss today form the cornerstone of public health protections. Before Superfund and RCRA, there was Love Canal, a New York neighborhood built atop thousands of tons of toxic waste carelessly disposed of in a ditch. Before the Safe Drinking Water Act, the American public had no assurances that the water coming from their tap was free of cancer-causing chemicals and dangerous bacteria.

Today we will hear precious little about the benefits of protecting the public from these toxic exposures. Instead, the subcommittee is likely to focus solely on the economic costs of environmental regulations. I have no objection to discussing the economics of environmental regulation, but any fair and balanced discussion should include both sides of the equation – the economic benefits as well as the costs.

Environmental regulations protect the economy – as well as society – from the devastating cost of pollution. In the absence of sound regulation, when polluters are allowed to pollute, the costs of that pollution don’t simply disappear. Instead, innocent parties have to pick up the tab. Our health care system has to bear the weight of asthmatic children and more adults with cancer. Businesses have to absorb the costs of employees who miss work due to chronic illness. Municipalities have to cover the costs of cleaning up toxic pollution before it reaches drinking water supplies.

Environmental regulations protect the public from these impacts. They can also spur economic growth and job creation. Expenditures for environmental compliance spur investment

in the design, manufacture, installation, and operation of equipment to reduce pollution. EPA recently estimated that the Clean Air Act's total benefit to the economy is projected to hit \$2 trillion by 2020, outweighing costs by 30 to 1.

It is a tenet of our society that we hold people accountable for their actions and that we offer protection to those who can't protect themselves. When a coal-burning power plant fails to invest in new pollution control equipment to reduce its toxic mercury emissions, it damages the way our children think and learn. That's why the responsible party – in this case the coal plant – has an obligation to control its emissions.

As I have said previously, let's put aside the false and hyperbolic claims about regulations killing jobs. No one supports unnecessary or duplicative regulations. But let's also not hesitate to regulate where needed to protect our economy and public health.