

OPENING STATEMENT

Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Full Committee

“Midnight Regulations: Examining Executive Branch Overreach”

February 10, 2016

Thank you. Mr. Chairman, this hearing is, unfortunately, not a surprise. It fits a clear and consistent pattern on this Committee -- one that ignores the important work that actually falls under the Committee's jurisdiction and instead attacks the federal government's legitimate and necessary role in helping to ensure that the citizens of this nation are protected from public health threats and environmental dangers. It may be fruitless to remind you of this, Mr. Chairman, but the Committee has little, if no, jurisdiction over the regulations likely to be discussed today. And while you and your colleagues may disagree with me, I think our time would be better spent on hearings that advance the nation's research, innovation, and manufacturing enterprises.

Nevertheless, today we will undoubtedly hear again the same tired rhetoric from the Majority, dismissing the need and value of regulations. The notion that federal regulations are not necessary because private industry would *never* harm the financial interests or health of the public is simply false. Federal regulations protect us from public health hazards, our children from unsafe products, communities from environmental dangers, and families from financial collapse. Federal regulations have played an important role in curbing the tobacco industry's past practices of marketing their knowingly harmful products to children and Wall Street investment practices that led to the 2008 financial crisis with dire economic consequences for millions of Americans. Federal regulations are not necessary or appropriate in every instance, for every issue. However, I believe they are a critical tool in many instances in helping to improve our health, make our children safer, and prevent deadly disasters.

For instance, the lead contamination crisis in Flint, Michigan is a clear example of the need for rigorous implementation of federal regulations and standards, not pulling back. Similarly, the ongoing massive methane gas leak in California is continuing to foul the environment and endanger the safety of the public's health. *No* federal regulations currently address the identification or repair of methane gas leaks across this country. But perhaps federal regulations *could* have helped prevent the Southern California Gas Company's leak, or the 1,724 significant natural gas incidents that have claimed the lives of 79 people, and injured 396 others, between 2010 and 2015. I believe that the regulations proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Interior to help detect and repair methane leaks are a positive first step.

I hope we can agree that issues like the methane gas leak in California should be thoroughly investigated to identify measures to prevent them from occurring in the future. That is why I am asking the Government Accountability Office to investigate the Southern California Gas Company leak, where the continuing release of methane has forced thousands from their homes and poses a significant threat to public health. There are serious unanswered questions surrounding this leak, and the safety and operation of these pipelines in general, which are far more worthy of this Committee's time and consideration than today's hearing. In particular, this Committee has a role to play in the technical standards and pipeline safety research governing the country's natural gas infrastructure. Mr. Chairman, I hope that you will join me in requesting this review.

In closing, I look forward to the day when this Congress and this Committee will step back from its counterproductive opposition to efforts by the EPA, DOE, and other federal agencies who are just trying to carry out their statutorily mandated missions. They may not always get everything exactly right, but trying to prevent them from doing their job at all is not a good use of our time. Instead of seeking to score political points by undermining their important work, we should come together in a productive way to advance our economy, a cleaner environment, and a healthier public.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, before I yield back I'd like to enter into the record a letter from 600 physicians, nurses, and other health professionals who support EPA's proposed rule to reduce methane emissions. Thank you.