

Opening Statement

Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson
House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

“Examining the Science of EPA Overreach: A Case Study in Texas”

February 5, 2014

Thank you, Chairman Smith, and thank you to our witnesses for being here this morning. I am always proud to be in a room full of Texans. As a Texan, I know well the importance and the impact of oil and natural gas development in this country. Our economy has relied on fossil fuels to power our manufacturing base, our transportation and agricultural sectors, and more. And, for the foreseeable future, the country will continue to develop these resources and technologies to achieve our energy, economic, national security, and, in some cases, our environmental objectives.

However, we must acknowledge that the development of any fossil fuel resource can have significant negative environmental impacts. I am not speaking about the environment in the abstract, but about the very oceans we fish, the air we breathe, and the water we drink. These too have real economic value. While few people get rich from clean air and water, everybody benefits. Likewise, nobody should have the right to take those away, regardless of the potential for financial profit.

This is why we have an EPA, and why Congress has acted in the past to protect our air and water through legislation such as the Clean Air Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act, with the results being just that – cleaner air and safer drinking water. And that’s something that both Democrats and Republicans should be happy about.

Today we will hear from some Members and witnesses that EPA is acting beyond its authority, that EPA regulations are killing the economy and jobs, and that industry and the state of Texas do not need the federal government to tell them how to protect public health and the environment. As much as some might wish for a world where big environmental issues are addressed voluntarily by industry or through the workings of the free market, or through individual state regulations, we all know from experience that it just does not work that way.

Now, more than ever, the American people need a strong EPA to protect their right to clean air and water. These are people who, regardless of where they fall in the partisan divide, universally agree clean air and water are important to them and their children. And they know that respiratory diseases, heart attacks, and premature deaths are not part of the sacrifice we should have to make for the sake of achieving the “American Dream.”

[Mr. Chairman, I received a number of letters from Texans expressing their concern about the air and water in their communities and their hope that EPA and the state will do more; I'm attaching these letters to my statement as part of the record.]

Let me be clear. I firmly believe we can have both a strong economy and a safe and healthy environment. In fact, there is much more evidence showing jobs are created and the economy expands following the passage of major environmental reforms. For example, between 1970 and 2011, air pollution dropped 68 percent, while the nation's gross domestic product grew by 212 percent and the number of private sector jobs increased by 88 percent.

As someone who worked in public health before I entered politics, I can think of no mission of the federal government that is more important or noble than EPA's mission to "*protect human health and the environment.*" I am hopeful that Congress can get past this misguided and disingenuous war on the dedicated scientists and public servants of the EPA, and that we can come together to advance our economy and a cleaner environment and healthier public.

Thank you and I yield back.