

Chairman Lisa A. Murkowski Opening Statement
Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Hearing to Review the FY2020 Budget Request for the Environmental Protection Agency

April 3, 2019

(As prepared for delivery)

Good morning. Thank you to everyone for being here today. Before we begin, I'd like to say congratulations to you, Administrator Wheeler, on your recent confirmation. I thank you and Holly Greaves for being here to discuss the fiscal year 2020 budget request for the Environmental Protection Agency.

When I go home to Alaska, I see firsthand how the EPA impacts the lives of Alaskans by improving the health of our communities. From restoring contaminated sites to ensuring clean drinking water, the EPA touches the lives of Americans across our country every day. This is why supporting EPA's core responsibilities of clean air, clean water and clean land is so important.

Thank you again for being here today to discuss how this budget request would impact the work of the EPA. As a reminder, we'll adhere to the "early bird rule" for recognizing members for questions. I will call on members in the order they arrive, going back and forth between the majority and the minority. Each member will have five minutes for a round of questions. I'm hopeful to get through multiple rounds with one caveat: it is my goal to finish this hearing by 10:30 A.M. in order to accommodate the Joint Session that was scheduled after we confirmed this hearing. Other questions may be submitted for the record.

Administrator Wheeler, I appreciate the work you've done on returning EPA to a back-to-basics management approach. Instead of pushing a one-size-fits-all regulatory agenda that exceeds the statutory authority of the EPA, we've seen this Administration shift focus back to prioritizing programs with actual on-the-ground cleanup and real environmental benefits. You're on the right track.

The Agency under your leadership must continue to implement a regulatory agenda that supports responsible development and robust environmental protections, achieved through a cooperative federalism approach with the states, and consultation with the tribes. Whether it is the work the Agency has done to revise the overreaching Waters of the United States (WOTUS) rule or addressing the important issue of climate change, where Alaska is warming at a rate much faster than the rest of the country, we must be partners in supporting the responsibilities of the Agency.

Turning to Fiscal Year 2020, the EPA's budget request totals approximately \$6.1 billion, which is a 30% reduction. The Agency's proposal is similar to past requests from this Administration and it is just that: a proposal. While I appreciate this budget's recognition of numerous programs that have bipartisan support, many of the included reductions would not effectively support the back-to-basics approach I highlighted earlier or support the Agency's core responsibilities.

Many of the grant programs that are critical to EPA's core mission of protecting the health of our communities are proposed for significant reductions. These grant programs lead to tangible environmental and human health benefits by supporting contaminated sites clean-up, financing drinking water and sanitation infrastructure, and much more.

I have worked hard over the years to secure funding for programs that lead to real results for the people of Alaska, and I will continue to do so. The Targeted Airshed Grants program which is helping to reduce air pollution for Alaskans in Fairbanks is eliminated in this budget. The Alaska Native Village program is proposed for an 85% reduction even though this funding is critical to supporting the water infrastructure needs of Native Alaskans in remote villages. Many communities in Alaska face the challenges of residing in remote locations resulting in high costs for the transportation of necessary supplies. EPA programs that help meet those challenges will always receive my attention and support.

The Agency's budget request makes large reductions to state grant programs, such as the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds, which I know is also of concern to my colleagues. I do appreciate that this request includes a proposal for a new \$50 million grant program to study and resolve environmental hazards at our nation's schools. Ensuring healthy environments for children is a mission well deserving of support; and that's why we must also make sure the state grant programs receive the funding they need.

While I understand the tough budget environment this proposal was crafted in, the final budget for EPA as crafted by Congress will look substantially different than this request. As I mentioned earlier, Congress is a critical partner of the EPA on protecting the health of our communities and addressing the many environmental needs of our country. I look forward to working with you on implementing the budget that Congress will provide the EPA for fiscal year 2020.

To close, I would like to thank you for your commitment to continue working with me on a number of items that uniquely affect Alaska – including fish grinding, small remote incinerators, and PM 2.5 in Fairbanks. I'll be asking you about a number of them in my questions and look forward to your continued help toward resolving these issues.

Before I turn to Ranking Member Udall, I must say what a pleasure it has been leading this Subcommittee with him. We have worked well together on many issues and have reached bipartisan compromises even on very contentious matters. I was saddened to hear of his retirement announcement, but I know he will be a tireless advocate for New Mexico for the remainder of his service in the Senate and beyond. I will now turn to my colleague and friend from New Mexico for any comments he would like to make.

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