

Chairman Lisa A. Murkowski Opening Statement
Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Hearing to Review the FY2019 Budget Request for the Environmental Protection Agency

May 16, 2018

(As prepared for delivery)

Good morning, everyone. Today, we are here to review the FY 2019 budget request for the Environmental Protection Agency. I'd like to begin by welcoming our witnesses: We welcome back to the committee Administrator Pruitt. He is accompanied by Holly Greaves who is the Chief Financial Officer for the Agency. Thank you both for coming back before the Subcommittee.

Just a reminder to colleagues, we'll follow the "early bird rule" here. We'll have six-minute rounds of questions. There will be substantial interest in this hearing this morning, so I ask members to stick with the time limit. We can do multiple rounds, but the Administrator has a hard stop at noon so we will be working to meet that. We also have a couple votes at noon as well.

Each year, this Subcommittee holds a hearing to examine the EPA's budget request. In some years, the budget is the focus of the hearing, appropriately so. In other years, Agency actions draw the majority of the questions. I would suggest that the size of the audience this morning is an indicator of substantial interest in this year's hearing, so I look forward to the dialogue.

Administrator Pruitt, when you were before the committee last year you said that you would work to return the EPA to its core mission of ensuring clean water, clean air, and clean land, something that we all encourage and support. You also stated a desire to treat states as equal partners rather than as adversaries and to promote cooperative federalism approach in your actions.

As you have worked through this past year, I have seen many steps, several steps that demonstrate that commitment to those goals. With regards to the Waters of the United States, WOTUS, a significant issue before a state like mine where there are approximately two-thirds of the state of Alaska are considered wetlands. For us, this has very real implications. Your commitment to work with me on the issue of continued use of small, remote incinerators. And, your efforts to avoid duplicative financial assurance requirements on hardrock mining, these are areas where we have had an opportunity to engage and I think advance some common goals here.

Unfortunately, I am concerned that many of the important policy efforts that you are engaged in are being overshadowed because of a series of issues related to you and your management of the Agency. Instead of being asked about the work that you are doing on WOTUS, or the Clean Power Plan, or the Superfund program, I am being asked, really constantly asked, to comment on security, on housing, and on travel. Instead of seeing articles about your efforts to return the Agency to its core mission, I am reading about your interactions with representatives of the industries that you regulate.

Some of this is undoubtedly a result of the "gotcha" age that we live in today, that dominates the politics of today. But I do think there are legitimate questions that need to be answered. I know you had an opportunity to speak before the House committees last week and get some of this information out on the record and we'll have an opportunity to do that today. A series of investigations are now underway. I would hope that you can fully answer the questions that members that they will pose this morning.

Turning briefly to the fiscal year 2019 budget request, there was some effort in the FY19 budget proposal to reflect the budget deal that raised spending caps, the Administration's decision to use only portions of available funds guarantees that the FY19 budget cannot fully match the final funding levels of the FY18 omnibus.

I recognize you have made an effort to propose robust funding for programs that have broad support in a challenging budget environment. Although the request makes large reductions to state grant programs, you do propose \$27 million for multipurpose grants to help states meet statutory duties, which is important. The President's budget also maintains funding for the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds as well as keeping the Superfund program at the FY17 enacted level.

Some of the Alaska specific concerns that I will share with you, I see on-the-ground examples of some very good things, some good programs that your budget is proposing to either substantially reduce or has proposed to eliminate. The community of Fairbanks, we've had an opportunity to talk about their air quality issues, Fairbanks will have cleaner air because of the Agency's use of Targeted Airshed Grants. We funded this at its highest level ever in FY18. You have proposed a reduction. Our villages will have cleaner water because of the Alaska Native Villages water program as well as a new program authorized in the WIIN Act that we funded in the FY18 omnibus to help communities that need basic water infrastructure. Your proposal eliminates or reduces these programs greatly. These are cuts that I cannot support. So, I want to in full disclosure highlight those.

As I mentioned in last year's appropriations hearing – and as played out in FY18 – the Agency's final budget will not look a whole lot like this proposal. While the Administration proposes a budget, Congress will use its power of the purse to reflect its spending priorities. And, while there is a need to closely examine every budget line to ensure that we responsibly spend taxpayer dollars, many of the large cuts proposed in this budget I believe are unsustainable and would make it difficult for the Agency and its state partners to carry out their work.

So I am going to focus my efforts on restoring proposed cuts to state grant programs and to programs like the Alaska Native Villages water program, the Targeted Airshed Grants program, and the radon program – all of which have a direct impact on cleaning up the environment and ensuring human health. Last year, you committed to work with the committee to implement the budget that Congress provides, and we would certainly anticipate that you would do so again in FY19.

As I close, I again want to thank you for the work that you have committed to us on some notably lower profile issues that only affect Alaska. My poor colleague from New Mexico has to listen to me talk about fish waste grinding, and small remote incinerators, and PM 2.5. So these are areas that are a great concern to a state like mine. I know my colleagues have many other issues you will hear raised this morning.

Again, I thank you for appearing before the committee and I now turn to my Ranking Member Senator Udall for his comments.

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