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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

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Opening Statement Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member

Hearing on "Management Failures: Oversight of the EPA"

June 25, 2014

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Today's hearing is significant because it marks the first time that the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, Ms. McCarthy, will testify before any Committee of Congress since the EPA issued its proposed rule to limit carbon pollution from power plants.

The rule, which is part of the President's Climate Action Plan, is a landmark step toward addressing climate change. The time for our nation to take action on climate change is now. The science is clear, and the evidence is overwhelming.

So I welcome Administrator McCarthy, and I look forward to hearing more about the agency's action on this critical issue.

I also welcome Senator Whitehouse and Senator Vitter. It is good to have you both here today. Just last week, Senator Whitehouse, who chairs the Senate Subcommittee on Clean Air and Nuclear Safety, held a remarkable hearing with testimony from four previous EPA Administrators. They were all appointed by Republican presidents, and they all testified about the urgent need for the United States to act on climate change now.

These four Republican Administrators wrote an op-ed in the New York Times on August 1, 2013, and they said this:

Each of us took turns over the past 43 years running the Environmental Protection Agency. We served Republican presidents, but we have a message that transcends political affiliation: the United States must move now on substantive steps to curb climate change, at home and internationally.

These four Republican Administrators endorsed President Obama's Climate Action Plan. Here is what they wrote:

A market-based approach, like a carbon tax, would be the best path to reducing greenhouse-gas emissions, but that is unachievable in the current political gridlock in

Washington. Dealing with this political reality, President Obama's June climate action plan lays out achievable actions that would deliver real progress.

These words came from officials who served in the Nixon Administration, the Reagan Administrations, and both Bush Administrations. But is Congress listening? Are we hearing their urgent warnings? Unfortunately, it appears that the answer is no.

Republicans have designated this week in the House of Representatives as "Energy Week." Yet they refuse to consider any legislation to address climate change. Instead, they will vote over and over again to protect the interests of the fossil fuel industry.

As a result, this week the House of Representatives will take its 500th anti-environment vote since Republicans took the majority in the 112th Congress.

Unfortunately, the actions of this Committee seem to reflect these same priorities. The official purpose of today's hearing is not to address climate change or the response of federal agencies to one of the most enormous challenges facing our nation and the world. Instead, the Committee will focus on what appears to be an effort to block EPA at every turn and to prevent the agency from getting anything done.

Since 2011, Chairman Issa has launched an unprecedented 18 separate investigations into EPA activities. He has sent 49 letters, issued two subpoenas, and held 15 hearings, including this one. Today, some Committee Members will accuse Administrator McCarthy of obstructing congressional oversight.

But the facts show this simply isn't true. EPA employees have testified at more than a dozen hearings. They have participated in numerous transcribed interviews, depositions, and briefings. And they have produced more than 200,000 pages of documents to the Committee since 2011.

I want to be clear that some of these investigations are worthwhile. The actions by John Beale, for example, of pretending to be a CIA agent while working at the EPA, are criminal, and they deserved to be investigated and prosecuted.

But eventually, I believe the Committee must turn from "oversight" to "reform." At some point, history calls on us to take on the greatest challenge our generation has ever faced in global warming.

EPA must fulfill its mission of protecting human health and our environment, and Congress should do everything in our power to make sure they have the resources and the tools necessary to do so. Thank you.

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