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On February 7, the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee held the “Making EPA Great Again” hearing. In his opening statements, Chairman Lamar Smith (R-TX-21) expressed his disapproval of the current use of scientific research at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Ranking member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-Texas) stated her disappointment that the first committee hearing of this year was focused on attacking the EPA’s scientific processes.

Four witnesses testified during the hearing: Jeffrey Holmstead, an attorney and former EPA official; Kimberly White, of the American Chemistry Council (ACC); Richard Belzer, a cost-benefit analysis consultant; and Rush Holt, CEO of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS).

The witnesses’ testimonies on science at the EPA lead to a discussion of two bills introduced in the 114th Congress. The first bill, the Secret Science Reform Act (H.R.1030), would mandate that all EPA science and scientific data would be reproducible and available for public review. The second bill, the EPA Science Advisory Board Reform Act (H.R.1029), would broaden the “political diversity” of members on the EPA Science Advisory Board. The board, says Chairman Smith, has become a “rubber stamp” for EPA’s regulations and does not critically assess these rules.

In addition to raising these concerns, witnesses testified upon other EPA procedures. Kimberly White testified that the EPA’s chemical assessment procedures are in need of reassessment. Richard Belzer stated the concern that the EPA often overestimates the human health costs of pollution.

In contrast to these testimonies, Rush Holt testified in support of EPA science, and the EPA’s current role in societal concerns. In his opening statement, he called for “reverence for evidence in our policymaking.” Dr. Holt testified that the scientific process, the process the EPA utilized, has positively served the nation, and should not be reformed for political gain. He stated that proposed reforms would hinder this process and the ability of the EPA to efficiently issue effective and current regulations.

These opinions on scientific evaluation processes remain a theme in the current committee, and were revisited at its hearing on the Social Cost of Carbon.

Sources: Congress.gov, House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
