

NATIONAL REVIEW

Congress Plans to Make the EPA Great Again

GOP lawmakers are determined to weed out costly regulations based on dubious science.

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One of the biggest post-election winners on Capitol Hill is Representative Lamar Smith, chairman of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee. This soft-spoken Texas Republican has become an unlikely warrior against dubious science used to justify costly federal regulations imposed on American industry, particularly from the Environmental Protection Agency.

Over the past eight years, Obama-administration officials have blocked Smith's demands for more accountability and transparency at several U.S. agencies. He is now poised to find much-needed support from President Trump, who has called for major changes at the EPA. "This new administration will help us and we can get to the truth," Smith told me in his Capitol Hill office last week. On February 7, Smith's committee held a hearing cheekily entitled, "Making EPA Great Again." In his opening remarks, Smith leveled harsh criticism at the agency he accuses of pursuing a political agenda rather than a scientific one. The EPA has proposed some of the most expensive and expansive and ineffective regulations in history. Huge costs were shouldered by the taxpayer with little to show for it. The previous EPA's regulations were all pain and no gain.

It's that bluntness — and his skepticism about man-made climate change — that has made Smith a target of environmental activists, liberal lawmakers, and climate cheerleaders in the media. Mother Jones recently compared Smith's committee to the Spanish Inquisition, and Michael Mann, a leading climate-change activist and author of the infamous hockey-stick model attempting to prove global warming, referred to Smith's actions as a "McCarthy-like assault on science." But none of this has deterred Smith: "The liberal media and environmental extremists have not been upfront with the American people [on climate change]." Smith's biggest concern is how science is corrupted to reach politically motivated outcomes: The federal government funds scientists to produce the results the administration wanted, and they feed off each other.

They skirt the law, manipulate regulations, and tamper with evidence. The losers are the American people and good scientists. Some scientists contacted Smith to share their concern about the way science — especially climate science — is conducted at the federal level.

In 2015, the House passed Smith's Secret Science Reform Act that would have required EPA science to be both publicly available for independent review and reproducible. The bill stalled in the Senate amid threats of an Obama veto but could now be revisited. For all its talk about being transparent and pro-science, the Obama administration was anything but. Smith often battled with President Obama's EPA administrator, Gina McCarthy, who signed off on a deluge of burdensome and costly rules such as the Clean Power Plan (stayed by the Supreme Court last year), all for the sake of fighting climate change. McCarthy frequently stymied congressional oversight, refusing to give Congress EPA e-mails and correspondence, even deleting some electronic communications such as text messages from government-issued devices.

And when papers were turned over, they were almost completely redacted. Given the EPA's history of brazenness and obfuscation, it won't be a surprise if incoming EPA administrator Scott Pruitt discovers more missing documents at the agency. (Last week McCarthy told Politico, which referred to her as the "nationwide environmentalist-in-chief," that changes at the EPA are keeping her up at night.) For all its talk about being transparent and pro-science, the Obama administration was anything but. Others agree it's time for more sunshine than shade at the EPA: "The politicized nature of the public climate-science debate has clearly weakened trust in the agency's conclusions," Ryan Maue, adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute, told me. "At the EPA, climate science has served a critical role in the development and issuance of many controversial regulations."

That tactic has worked. According to a report issued on February 2 by the American Action Forum, the Obama administration's EPA regulations racked up \$344 billion in regulatory costs, far outpacing any other federal agency. The think tank says that the EPA's costliest rules were efficiency standards for light-duty and heavy-duty vehicles. President Trump has pledged to cut two regulations for every one regulation passed, and the EPA will provide him fertile ground for keeping that promise. Smith has some new allies in his upcoming battle.

Trump's EPA transition team said that the president wants to cut the number of EPA employees by two-thirds and take a closer look at more than \$6 billion in outstanding contracts. Smith appointed two newly elected conservative Republicans to serve on the House Science Committee, Andy Biggs of Arizona and Jim Banks of Indiana. Both men represent districts affected by heavy-handed EPA regulations, and they are eager to take on the daunting task of reforming one of Washington's most powerful agencies. "The EPA has done more irreparable damage than any other agency," Biggs told me. "It's anti-state, anti-federalist, and liberty-killing."

When I told Banks, a Navy reservist once deployed to Afghanistan, that he'll be a target of aggressive and often nasty environmental activists, he was unfazed: "I look forward to that." They'll need all the resolve they can get as they face the deep pockets of activists such as California billionaire Tom Steyer, well-funded charitable groups, and universities and businesses profiting off the climate-change agenda. The scientific community is in full panic mode,

marshalling their numbers and resources to fight any attempt to let their ideological foes — Republicans — move into their territory.

Organizers are planning a March for Science on April 22 that is already shaping up to be more anti-Trump than pro-science. But Smith is energized and empowered by the new political landscape. And his rationale for taking this on seems downright Trump-like: “It’s time to let the American people know the truth.” Making the EPA great again (for once?) would be a good start.