

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY  
Subcommittee on Environment

HEARING CHARTER

*The State of the Environment: Evaluating Progress and Priorities*

**Thursday, February 14, 2013**

**10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.**

**2318 Rayburn House Office Building**

**Purpose**

On Thursday, February 14, 2013, the Subcommittee on Environment will hold a hearing to assess broad environmental trends and indicators, including an examination of factors such as air and water quality, chemical exposure, environmental and human health, and climate change. Witnesses are asked to provide their perspective on progress and challenges on these environmental trends as they relate to research and development, regulation, technological innovation, energy use and Americans' changing standard of living.

**Witnesses**

- **The Honorable Kathleen Hartnett White**, Distinguished Fellow-in-Residence & Director, Armstrong Center for Energy & the Environment, Texas Public Policy Foundation
- **Mr. Richard Trzupsek**, Principal Consultant, Trinity Consulting
- **Dr. Bernard Goldstein**, Professor and Dean Emeritus, University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health

**Overview**

Since many environmental statutes were enacted in the 1970s and 1980s, there have been significant improvements in virtually all major environmental indicators in the United States. For example, the aggregate emissions for the six criteria air pollutants regulated under the Clean Air Act have dropped 63 percent since 1980. Over the same period, America's Gross Domestic Product increased 128 percent, energy consumption increased 26 percent, population grew by 37 percent, and vehicle miles traveled increased 94 percent.<sup>1</sup> See Chart 1 for a Comparison of Growth Areas and Emissions, 1980-2011.

These trends are also reflected in other metrics, including enhanced water quality, reduction of toxic chemical exposure, decreased carbon intensity, energy intensity, forest size, land use, and biodiversity. For many of the traditional pollutants regulated under statutes such as the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act, virtually all of the less-expensive environmental improvements have been achieved. One of the questions to be discussed at this hearing will be the estimated costs for additional, proposed EPA reductions and how much incremental benefit might be attained.

A systematic process for evaluating the state of the environment, environmental priorities at EPA, or conducting comprehensive retrospective analyses on environmental progress has yet to be

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.epa.gov/airtrends/aqtrends.html>

developed. The last “Report on the Environment”<sup>2</sup> by the EPA’s National Center for Environmental Assessment was completed in 2008. The EPA has not conducted a comprehensive assessment of the highest-priority environmental issues, especially where limited research and regulatory resources should be directed, since the early 1990s.

Further hampering the assessment of general environmental health is the lack of data available to make such evaluations. For example, the EPA abandoned a two-decade long National Water Quality Inventory due to inconsistent and low quality data collection in 2004. In its place, the EPA implemented the Wadeable Streams Assessment (WSA), measuring 20 categories of water conditions through a random sampling of 1,300 streams and small rivers across the U.S. However, questions have been raised about the utility of this assessment.

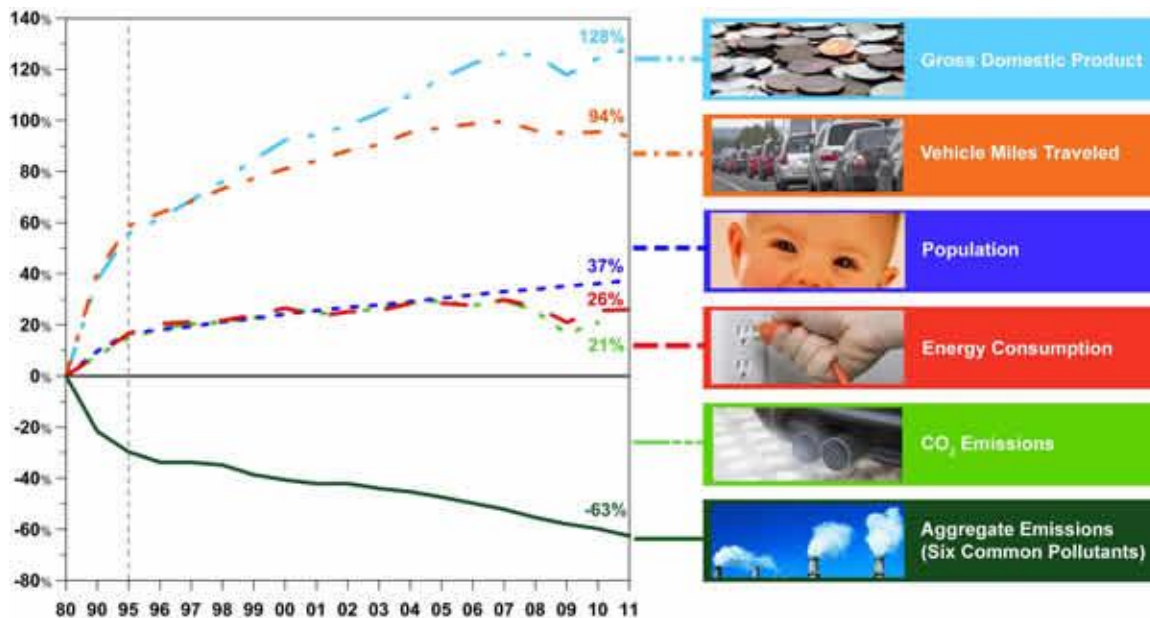
This hearing will examine these trends and indicators, explore what progress is still needed in order to protect human health and the environment, and consider how best such advances may be accomplished.

**Additional Reading**

[EPA National Center for Environmental Assessment](http://www.epa.gov/ro/)

[American Enterprise Institute 2011 Almanac of Environmental Indicators](http://www.aei.org/pubs/pubs.cfm?id=1187)

**Chart 1.** Comparison of Growth Areas and Emissions, 1980-2011<sup>3</sup>.



<sup>2</sup> <http://www.epa.gov/ro/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.epa.gov/airtrends/aqtrends.html#comparison>