

OPENING STATEMENT
Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

House Science, Space, and Technology Committee
Markup of: H.R. 1431, the “*EPA Science Advisory Board Reform Act*”
March 9, 2017

Thank you Chairman Smith.

Like the HONEST Act, I strongly oppose the Science Advisory Reform Act. And, at the core, I oppose this bill for many of the same reasons. This bill is a transparent attempt to slow down the regulatory process and stack science review boards with industry representative. The result would be similar to the HONEST Act - worse science at the EPA and less public health protections for American citizens.

The problems with this legislation are three-fold. First, the bill makes it easier for industry representatives to serve on science advisory boards by only requiring them to disclose their conflicts of interest. I have no problem with industry representation on these advisory boards, and in fact, under the requirements of the Federal Advisory Committee Acts, science advisory panels are required to have a balanced composition. However, this bill would allow unlimited participation by financially conflicted industry representatives, and that I cannot support.

The second major problem with this legislation is that it would make it much more difficult for scientists with extramural research grants from EPA to serve on the board. This prohibition is likely to eliminate consideration of the top scientists in the relevant fields serving on science advisory boards. In conjunction with the loosened industry financial conflict requirements, this prohibition will result in science advisory panels with less qualified scientists and more conflicts of interest.

Finally, this legislation contains incredibly burdensome public comment requirements. The bill prevents comment cutoff dates, requires detailed review and reporting of comments, and requires the advisory panels to respond to any significant comments, especially those that run counter to mainstream science. The end result of this is to delay the SABs’ reviews and force the agency to expend resources it simply doesn’t have.

We are in an unprecedented time right now. For the past three Congresses the Chairman and his Majority colleagues on the Science Committee have repeatedly attacked the ability of the EPA to use the best available science to improve public health. We now have a President who has attacked mainstream scientific views repeatedly. The threats to the scientific enterprise in America right now are profound. These threats have the potential to do great damage to American industry, American competitiveness, and the health of our citizens. I will vigorously oppose these efforts every step of the way, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

I yield back.