

Preserving the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Background:

President Richard Nixon signed the bill to establish the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Dec. 1970. It was pulled together from dozens of other organizations in ‘predecessor agencies, services, administrations, and offices.’ The purpose was to consolidate the ‘protection’ functions in one servicing agency with an independent budget and authority to ‘protect.’ Along with the functions it inherited, it was asked to develop programs to address conditions of national significance to human health, the environment, and the economy. Its statutory authority had immense reach...to protect.

Since that time, it has been one of the smallest of the independent agencies in the Executive Branch. It has always had leaders of professional legal and technical standing.

EPA’s ability to coordinate these functions and get environmental results depended on:

- Voluntary and regulatory reporting (confirmed by both the Agency and the States in partnership).
- Public support for statutory standards and goals.
- Public financial support through direct appropriations and grants to States.
- The professionalism of the EPA staff and their counterparts in the States (scientists, engineers, technicians, field personnel, and leaders).
- Trust based on the working relationship and local results: huge improvements in air and water quality, safer pesticides, higher-yielding farm, fishing, and forest practices, and safer disposal of wastes. EPA is largely responsible for the mindset of ‘pollution prevention,’ ‘clean manufacturing,’ and ‘green design.’

Over the years EPA has developed a workforce of specialists that cannot be acquired off the street, directly out of professional schools, or imported from other agencies. EPA has attracted first rate toxicologists, risk assessors, species experts, waste-disposal experts, chemical engineers, and epidemiologists. This talent continues to work under Congressionally-approved statutes to assure basic public safety under regulations adopted with extensive stakeholder input.

President Trump's emphasis on ‘destroying the administrative state’ and the proposed drastic budget cuts will leave future environmental managers with nothing to do but nurse the standards review process in a shell of an agency whose purpose is to stand down on enforcement of the ‘law of the land’ for purely ideological reasons. He has proposed a 31% reduction in the 2018 EPA budget, and a recent POLITICO/Harvard poll shows that 60% of the American public opposes these cuts. The Trump Administration has already proposed closing EPA's Region 5 Office in Chicago.

If these proposed budget cuts take effect, EPA's specialized workforce will atrophy and may take years to re-establish if funding were to be restored in the future. The reporting systems and data quality assurance functions will disappear and take years to rebuild. State environmental efforts that rely on EPA grants would also be decimated. In the absence of enforceable, national standards or EPA resources, state and local environmental protection will be imperiled.

Therefore, be it resolved that, the 2017 Eighth District Democratic Convention:

- 1) Condemns the proposed budget cuts to the Environmental Protection Agency as detrimental to protecting the nation's clean air and water.
- 2) Urges the Congress to use a full life cycle cost analysis in setting budget priorities rather than ideological agendas.