

August 12, 2020

As former leaders of the Environmental Protection Agency serving both Democratic and Republican administrations, we take great pride in the agency's many successes improving the quality of the air we breathe, safeguarding the water we drink, and protecting the environment that sustains us and our economy.

As EPA approaches its 50th anniversary this December, we believe the time has come to reset the future course for EPA in a new, forward-looking direction to address the environmental challenges we face today and those that lie ahead.

The nature of the environmental and health challenges our nation faces have changed. Fifty years ago, pollution was visible and unrelenting throughout our country. Today, less visible but equally dangerous environmental hazards threaten communities in ways that differ place to place, person to person.

Climate change is having far-reaching impacts on air quality, infectious diseases, and water quantity and quality, as well as intensifying destructive climate events such as floods, storms, wildfires, and droughts. Environmental injustices are putting lower-wealth communities, communities of color, and indigenous communities at disproportionately high levels of exposure, risk, and vulnerability to toxic pollution, not to mention the pandemic we are now facing. Speedier, more effective assessments and responses will be needed to face this and future pandemics, new toxic hazards, and other emerging or unmitigated health risks.

The Environmental Protection Network (EPN) and its over 500 EPA alumni have developed detailed recommendations for setting new directions at EPA. We invite everyone to take a look at this important report, available at www.environmentalprotectionnetwork.org/reset. Not everyone will agree with every recommendation, for there is no single roadmap for the way forward. We agree with EPN that the following overarching recommendations for EPA are essential to meet the environmental challenges of the 21st century and improve people's lives and our economy.

1. EPA must reaffirm its commitment to fully protect public health and the environment.
2. EPA must conduct its scientific and economic analysis free from political interference.
3. EPA must incorporate environmental justice in every aspect of its work in order to address and resolve inequitable environmental conditions.
4. EPA must focus on the most significant and pervasive public health and environmental risks, prioritizing actions that provide the greatest health benefit for the greatest number of people, including vulnerable populations.
5. EPA must innovate and collaborate with states, tribes, local governments, and federal agencies as co-regulators, as well as with stakeholders, including the private and non-profit sectors and community groups, to build an effective and resilient system of public health and environmental protections.
6. EPA must earn and maintain broad public trust by demonstrating the best ethical behavior, transparently considering all stakeholder viewpoints, and providing objective environmental information.

To do the job well, EPA will need additional resources. As new threats to the health and environmental needs of a growing population have multiplied, EPA’s budget has declined. In inflation-adjusted dollars, EPA’s budget was more than 50% higher under President Ronald Reagan than it is today. The steady deterioration of resources has undermined EPA’s readiness for the challenges ahead and the agency’s ability to adapt and respond to emerging needs.

While we are concerned about the current state of affairs at EPA, we are hopeful for the agency’s future. EPA has a strong foundation on which to build. Capable and talented staff are ready to answer the call. They have labored in good faith across administrations of both parties to fulfill EPA’s mission by following the law, applying the best available science, and displaying openness and transparency with the public.

America’s bedrock environmental laws have delivered enormous health and economic benefits to the American public, as documented by Republican and Democratic administrations alike.¹ The public values clean air, clean water, and a healthy natural environment, notwithstanding differences in priorities and approaches.

The years ahead will bring new and often far-reaching environmental and health risks. They also hold great potential for new approaches, new opportunities, and new technologies to confront environmental problems. Growing ranks of companies are showing internal leadership on sustainability without waiting for regulations. New technologies and data tools can pinpoint and help solve environmental threats. State and local governments, farmers and other landowners, community-based groups, universities, and others have pioneered new approaches to getting results.

We have successfully risen as a nation to confront past threats to our health and environment. We are at an environmental crossroads, and we are hopeful that America will again muster the resolve, the will, and the action needed to protect public health, the environment, and our economy.

In Real Dollars, EPA Spending Has Been Cut in Half Since 1980



Sources: Environmental Protection Network, "[Resetting the Course of EPA](#)," August 2020. OMB, [Historical Tables](#), "Table 4.1—Outlays by Agency: 1962–2025" (adjusted to real dollars using U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis' [implicit price deflator](#)); "Table 8.8 – Outlays for Discretionary Programs."

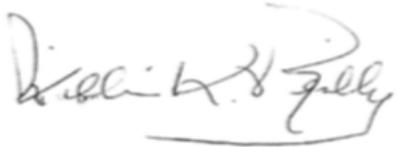
¹ For example, a [2019 Office of Management and Budget study](#) concluded that rules from EPA had the “highest estimated benefits” across the Federal government. OMB estimated the annual benefits of 39 EPA regulations to America’s people over a decade at between \$194 and \$687 billion, far outweighing costs to polluters of less than \$55 billion. In 2011, EPA studied 30 years of air quality improvements under the Clean Air Act and found benefits of more than \$2 trillion, more than 30 times greater than costs of \$65 billion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lee M. Thomas". The letters are cursive and fluid.

Hon. Lee Thomas

EPA Administrator, 1985-1989

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William Reilly". The signature is written in a cursive style.

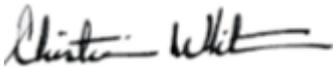
Hon. William Reilly

EPA Administrator, 1989-1993

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carol M. Browner". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Hon. Carol Browner

EPA Administrator, 1993-2001

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine Todd Whitman". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Hon. Christine Todd Whitman

EPA Administrator, 2001-2003

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Jackson". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Hon. Lisa Jackson

EPA Administrator, 2009-2013

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gina McCarthy". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Hon. Gina McCarthy

EPA Administrator, 2013-2017