

Statement of Stephen A. Owens
Hearing on Nominations
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
May 12, 2009

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

First, please let me thank Chairman Boxer and Ranking Member Inhofe for holding this hearing and giving me the opportunity to be here.

Also, Madam Chairman, if I may, I would like to introduce my wife, Karen, who is here with me today. Karen and I have two terrific teenage boys, John and Ben, who are in school back home in Arizona but who are with Karen and me in spirit today.

I am extremely honored to have been nominated by President Obama to be the Assistant Administrator for the Office of Prevention, Pesticides and Toxics Substances (OPPTS) at the Environmental Protection Agency.

I grew up in a poor family. We lived in public housing for a time when I was young, and I had part-time jobs while growing up to help make ends meet.

I worked my way through college and law school with the help of work-study jobs and student loans. I was fortunate to be admitted to Brown University, where I graduated with

honors, and thereafter to attend Vanderbilt Law School, where I was Editor in Chief of the Vanderbilt Law Review.

I have always had a deep commitment to public service.

For the last six years, from January 2003 until January of this year, I served as Director of the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) under Governor Janet Napolitano, making me the longest serving Director in ADEQ's history.

As Arizona's environmental protection agency, ADEQ is responsible at the state level for many of the programs overseen by OPPTS.

As ADEQ Director, I made protecting children's health and reducing children's exposure to toxic pollutants a top priority. In early 2003, I launched ADEQ's Children's Environmental Health Project at the direction of Governor Napolitano, and I later established an Office of Children's Environmental Health at ADEQ. Among our many efforts, we worked with schools to protect children from potential exposure to lead in drinking water, reduce mercury-containing equipment in schools, and minimize the use of pesticides on school properties through Integrated Pest Management (IPM). We promoted environmentally healthy schools and "green" schools, and we required facilities with permits or approvals from ADEQ to ensure that their activities do not present environmental health risks to children.

In the realm of pollution prevention, we launched initiatives to remove mercury switches in old motor vehicles, help businesses implement Environmental Management Systems, promote the construction of green buildings and provide technical assistance to facilities seeking LEED design and certification. We also worked closely with Indian Nations in Arizona to reduce toxic pollution on tribal lands.

We established an aggressive outreach effort to help local businesses and governments reduce exposure to asbestos hazards in aging buildings, especially in rural communities like those along Old Route 66 in northern Arizona, where many historic old buildings have asbestos.

Prior to becoming ADEQ Director, I was privileged to serve as a member of the Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC) of the North American Commission on Environmental Cooperation (CEC), where we addressed issues such as persistent organic pollutants (POPs), agricultural biotechnology, lead contamination, and the development of Regional Action Plans for toxic substances, among other matters.

I began my government service years ago in the 1980s when I was counsel to the Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee of the U.S. House Committee on Science & Technology. There, I learned about a wide array of programs and activities, as well as emerging issues and technologies, which are now within the purview of OPPTS.

My experiences with the Science & Technology Committee and elsewhere have led me to the strong belief that science must be the basis for what EPA does, as Administrator Jackson said in her testimony before this Committee in January, especially for the Office of Prevention, Pesticides and Toxic Substances. I agree strongly with Administrator Jackson that EPA's scientific decisions should reflect the expert judgment of the Agency's career scientists and independent advisors, and I pledge that as Assistant Administrator, the actions of OPPTS will be based on science.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today.