

The Honorable Bebe Heiskell  
Commissioner  
Walker County, Georgia

Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works  
Subcommittee on Clean Air, Climate Change, and Nuclear Safety

Environmental Protection Agency's Proposed Revisions  
To The Particulate Matter Air Quality Standards.

July 13, 2006  
Washington, D.C.

## **Introduction**

Good morning, Chairman Voinovich, Ranking Member Carper, and Members of the Subcommittee on Clean Air, Climate Change, and Nuclear Safety.

My name is Bebe Heiskell. I am the sole commissioner of Walker County, Georgia. We are located in the northwest corner of the state just south of Chattanooga. I am in the sixth year of elected office, with a background of twenty-seven years in public administration. Thank you for allowing me to describe the impact that non-attainment designations have on communities like mine.

The hardest part of my job is funding the delivery of services, such as road maintenance and meeting payrolls. I am where the rubber meets the road, face to face every day with the taxpayers that support our governments. Our residents recognize the property tax relief that a strong local economy provides.

## **Background on Walker County**

Walker County is a vibrant community of 63,000 people located in the northwest corner of Georgia. While the northernmost tip of the county borders the city of Chattanooga, Tennessee, the vast majority of Walker County is rural. A variety of national and international manufacturers have operations in Walker County and our corner of the state produces the vast majority of the world's carpet. Forty-six percent of Walker County's work force is employed in manufacturing while large numbers of our residents also leave the county each day to commute into Chattanooga for employment. They recognize the property tax relief provided by our industry.

## **Environmental Quality**

Walker County, and indeed the entire region surrounding Chattanooga, Tennessee, is blessed with healthy air and a clean environment. It was not so long ago, during its foundry era, that Chattanooga was named the dirtiest city in America with all the related health issues associated. Indeed, Chattanooga served as a poster child for Congressional efforts to pass the Clean Air Act. Since that time, however, thanks to the Clean Air Act our region has experienced a rebirth as we have cleaned up our environment and improved our air quality while at the same time managing to grow our economy. The businesses in my community have invested millions to reduce their emissions, cars are significantly cleaner than they were just ten years ago, power plants have spent billions on controls, and the two large metropolitan areas surrounding us have come into compliance with the 1-hour ozone standard. Now, I have the pleasure to represent part of what Outside Magazine called one of the ten best places to live in America.

As a community leader and an asthmatic, I appreciate all that EPA has done to see that we have cleaner air. In September 2004 EPA's own status report boasted "*U.S. Air Cleanest Ever Since 1970*", even while the economy has expanded 150% in that time period. American businesses should also be commended for their accomplishments.

### **Attainment Status**

Today the citizens of both Chattanooga and Walker County enjoy clean air and clear skies. Yet, we remain in non attainment for particulate matter largely through no fault of our own. Walker County's non-attainment status is almost exclusively due to outside influences on our air quality including up to sixty percent natural particulate matter, transported from Alaska, Canada, and amazingly Africa, which is completely out of our control. In addition, we are positioned between Chattanooga and Atlanta; two major interstate highways; and several large manufacturing facilities and power plants in the region.

Walker County is struggling to attain EPA's air quality standards and have implemented all practicable local control measures. While in non attainment, we are hopeful that the agency will eventually place us back into attainment. However, if EPA goes forth with its efforts to further revise the fine particulate matter standards, I simply don't know what we in Walker County will do. To be forced into perpetual non attainment will have a devastating impact on not only our economy, but on the lives of our citizens.

### **Impacts of Non Attainment**

Quality growth is vital to Walker County and other communities all over this country. Though our air is improving, I see the job losses that stem from perpetual non-attainment. This adds to the complexity of local governance while we struggle with public opposition to these non-attainment designations and many of our jobs go overseas.

From an economic development standpoint, being in non-attainment of EPA's fine particulate matter standards has serious consequences right now. Many industries begin a site location search using EPA's internet list of counties in non-attainment. Those counties never make the list of prospective sites.

Walker County has more than four million square feet of vacant manufacturing space, in large measure because of the uncertainty our non-attainment designation creates for business prospects. We have had some of our largest employers express frustration at incurring additional costs in order to comply with more stringent air quality standards even as foreign competition continues to squeeze their profit margins. Others have been reluctant to expand, and one business, a major automotive manufacturer facility decided not to locate a plant in the Chattanooga area, in part because of concerns over our attainment status. That plant was eventually located elsewhere, in an attainment area.

Needless to say, our non attainment designation has caused a real fear of layoffs amongst many of my constituents who have seen jobs elsewhere outsourced to China, Mexico and other foreign nations with little environmental protections. As an elected official, I fear the lost tax revenues and increased stresses on local health services that layoffs associated with our non attainment status bring.

## **Conclusion**

Georgia's late Senator Paul Coverdell said, "Investment does not flow toward uncertainty". A never-ending non-attainment designation creates uncertainty for communities and businesses.

I urge the Senate Committee to put EPA's standards in perspective of the loss of jobs and decisions of manufacturers to go abroad where there are no standards. The doubling of the global workforce has created greater competition for each available job. Retraining displaced workers that have lost their lifelong manufacturing jobs is difficult. They, the people we represent, are then concerned only about how they can take care of their families.

Does EPA make decisions based upon the demands of outside environmental groups, or is there a practical reason to continue to lower this designation?

I ran for office on quality growth and I am a long-time supporter of the environment. However, there must be a balance in all things. Please consider the significant air quality improvements already in place against the impacts of unending non-attainment designations before allowing EPA to stack another set of regulations on businesses and communities like mine.

Thank you for hearing my remarks.

Sincerely,

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