

Testimony of Katherine Scarlett
Nominee for Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality
U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee
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Good morning, Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Whitehouse, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for holding today's hearing. I am honored to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee for Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality.

I would like to thank my friends and colleagues who are here today, and most importantly my husband, Brian and my parents, Gail and Dallas Smith. I also want thank my two children, Rachel and Jack, who, after much debate and failed practice, we decided to leave at daycare today.

From a young age, I have been privileged to experience this Nation's vast beauty. From growing up playing baseball in "sandlots" in Grandview Heights, Ohio, traveling coast to coast with my college marching band, to honeymooning in our nation's breathtaking National Parks in Arizona and Utah, and now, watching my husband teach our children to set crab traps on the Chesapeake Bay, I know that we are blessed with a bountiful heartland and magnificent national parks, rivers, mountains, and coastlines.

Over the last eight years, I have worked in a variety of roles focusing on environmental policy and permitting. My first role at CEQ, as Special Assistant, marked my entry into public service in 2017 and ever since then I have remained dedicated to serving the American people. I moved into a policy role at CEQ in 2018 as Deputy Associate Director for Infrastructure. In 2020, I joined the Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council as its first Chief of Staff. And for four years, I had the honor of working as Professional Staff for this Committee before I took on my current role as Chief of Staff at CEQ.

My preparation for this role comes in large part from my experience at this Committee. In those four years, I worked on a number of bipartisan bills that became law, including the Surface Transportation Reauthorization of 2021, the Economic Development Reauthorization Act of 2024 and the America's Conservation Enhancement Act of 2024. EPW has a reputation for working in a bipartisan manner and passing legislation unanimously out of Committee. We worked across the aisle to turn ideas into bills and bills into laws, and I appreciate how those laws are rooted in the hard work of members and staff on *both* sides of the dais before me now. I am a better public servant for being a part of that process, and I am honored to be here today before the Committee to which I owe so much.

CEQ has a critical role providing guidance on implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act. NEPA provides a national policy to create and maintain the conditions under which man and nature can exist in “productive harmony.” Because of my experience, I recognize that environmental review and permitting processes affect every aspect of our nation from roads, bridges and habitat conservation projects to critical energy infrastructure and national security installations. If confirmed as Chair, I commit to leading the interagency process to advance these policies and ensure efficient and consistent environmental reviews across agencies.

Over the years, I have been afforded the opportunity to watch CEQ make incredible progress toward lasting permitting reform. When I started at CEQ, agencies often had little to no awareness of the categorical exclusions established by other agencies. These CEs were buried in the Code of Federal Regulations or guidance documents, and in some cases were not publicly available at all. As special assistant at CEQ, I helped create a “CE Catalog” identifying each Federal agency’s CEs in a simple Excel Spreadsheet. In this Administration, CEQ is now implementing Presidential and Congressional directives to leverage modern technology to improve the process. As part of this renewed effort, CEQ recently launched the *CE Explorer*. This online, searchable tool, derived from the original CE spreadsheet, will help agencies and stakeholders identify categorical exclusions that apply to their projects. This is the type of lasting impact I hope to continue and oversee, if confirmed to lead CEQ.

In closing, I believe that efficient and consistent decision making and robust environmental reviews are not mutually exclusive, but that much work can still be done to harmonize and advance these objectives. If confirmed, I commit to working with this Committee, Congress as a whole, and the public on these important goals. I will work hard every day to leverage this Nation’s environmental policies and technologies to grow the American economy while ensuring that every American has clean air, clean water, and clean land.

Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Whitehouse, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to answering your questions and working with you on these important issues, should I be confirmed.