

Statement of Senator James M. Inhofe

Subcommittee on Superfund, Waste Management, and Regulatory Oversight Hearing

“Oversight of the Environmental Protection Agency’s Progress in Implementing Inspector General and Government Accountability Office Recommendations”

Tuesday, June 14, 2016

Thank you Subcommittee Chairman Rounds for convening today’s oversight hearing, and thank you to our witnesses from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Office of Inspector General (OIG) for being here to testify.

Today’s hearing is important because members of Congress are charged with conducting oversight over executive agencies, such as the EPA, to ensure compliance with their statutory authority and mission in a manner free of waste, fraud, and abuse. EPA watchdogs such as the GAO and the OIG play a critical role in partnership with Congress to fulfill this oversight function.

I have long valued this partnership as a frequent requester of both GAO and EPA OIG reviews and investigations, which in many cases result in recommendations for the Agency to enhance performance, create efficiencies, and safeguard taxpayer dollars. However, as testimony today reveals, EPA has been slow to implement OIG and

GAO recommendations. For instance, GAO will testify that nearly thirty percent of EPA recommendations made between 2006 and 2011 remain unimplemented, and only 17 percent of GAO's recommendations from 2012 to 2015 have been implemented. The EPA OIG's testimony similarly highlights a significant number of open recommendations; most recently reporting 148 unimplemented EPA recommendations, 89 of which are more than a year old.

Among those unimplemented OIG and GAO recommendations, several are of great interest to the Committee's oversight efforts. For example, EPA has yet to implement various GAO recommendations regarding the Agency's procedures for processing Congressional requests for scientific advice by the Agency's Science Advisory Board. Further, EPA has yet to implement nearly two-year-old recommendations from GAO to improve its regulatory impact analyses, including updates to the way EPA estimates the impact its regulations have on employment. Finally, EPA still needs to implement various recommendations from the OIG to ensure its hiring process is sound in light of the John Beale scandal and the Agency's recent mass hiring.

These outstanding recommendations are concerning as both the EPA OIG and GAO are in the midst of substantial reviews and investigations into the Animas River spill at Gold King Mine and the drinking water crisis in Flint, Michigan. Subsequent GAO and OIG reports will undoubtedly include numerous recommendations for EPA,

yet based on testimony today I have little confidence EPA will fully and swiftly implement these recommendations.

Indeed, today's hearing raises questions about why EPA has been late to implementing many common-sense recommendations. I have been concerned the EPA has been deviating from its core mission and focusing on pushing new regulatory actions that are political priorities of President Obama without new authority from Congress, as is the case with the Clean Power Plan and Waters of the U.S. rule, which have both been halted by the Courts pending judicial review.

For these reasons, we need to engage with EPA watchdogs like GAO and the OIG to ensure they are effective and hold EPA accountable. Today is another step towards continuing that relationship.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today who will share perspective on EPA's major challenges and how the Agency is implementing GAO and OIG recommendations.

I ask that my full statement be entered into the record. Thank you.