

Statement of Stephen A. Owens
Hearing on Nominations
Subcommittee on Chemical Safety, Waste Management, Environmental Justice and
Regulatory Oversight
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
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Chairman Merkley, Ranking Member Wicker, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this hearing and giving me the opportunity to be here today.

I am extremely honored to be nominated by President Biden to be a member of the Chemical Safety & Hazard Investigation Board.

The Chemical Safety Board is a small agency, but it has a very big – and very important – mission: to conduct investigations and make recommendations that help ensure that chemical facilities are operated safely and that the people who work in them and the families who live near them are protected from chemical disasters.

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 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 I attended Vanderbilt Law School, where I was Editor in

Chief of the Vanderbilt Law Review.

I currently am an attorney in Phoenix, Arizona, where I practice environmental, safety and health law. My practice includes issues and regulations relating to chemical safety, safe chemical practices, and the production, management and safe use of chemicals at facilities.

I have always had a deep commitment to public service.

During the Obama-Biden Administration, I served as the Assistant Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in charge of the Office of Chemical Safety & Pollution Prevention, where I oversaw EPA's chemical regulatory programs, including implementation of the Toxic Substances Control Act, the primary federal law regulating the chemical industry in this country.

Our mission at EPA was to ensure the safety of chemicals, the safe production and use of chemicals, and the reduction of risks from chemicals to children, families, consumers, workers and other vulnerable populations. Among our efforts, we prepared Action Plans on priority chemicals, issued new rules to limit the risks presented by existing chemicals, and required testing on a number of high-risk chemicals. We launched the Chemical Data Reporting Rule, which requires chemical manufacturers to provide more detailed and comprehensive data on the chemicals they make and their uses. Further, we developed a framework for prioritizing chemicals for evaluation,

which led to EPA's chemical "work plan" that was incorporated into the 2016 amendments to the Toxic Substances Control Act.

We also increased transparency for chemical information and expanded public access to health and safety data on chemicals. We began the effort to reduce unnecessary confidentiality claims and declassify information where confidentiality is no longer warranted. We also made the Toxic Substances Control Act Inventory available to the public online and created a searchable data base that gives the public access to thousands of health and safety studies and other chemical information that has been submitted to EPA under the statute.

We also worked with tribal leaders to establish the National Tribal Toxics Council to expand safer chemical initiatives in Indian country and address unique chemical exposures on tribal lands and Alaska Native villages.

Before joining EPA, I served as Director of the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, where I guided the department's efforts on chemical safety and its role in responding to chemical hazards and other emergency situations. I made protecting children's health and reducing children's exposure to toxic pollutants a top priority. We also worked closely with tribal leadership to reduce toxic exposures on reservation lands in Arizona.

We increased the department's emergency response capabilities and activities. We placed a high priority on providing immediate localized air quality monitoring, data collection and emergency response support whenever there was a fire, explosion or other episode at a facility where chemicals were present, to protect the health and safety of the surrounding community and the first responders. Additionally, we worked closely with Arizona's law enforcement and homeland security officials to ensure the security of critical infrastructure in our state, including potentially at-risk chemical facilities, and I served on the executive oversight committee of the Arizona Counter-Terrorism Information Center.

My experiences have underscored for me the importance of following the facts, the law and the science in addressing chemical risks and ensuring the safety of chemical facilities. If I am privileged to serve on the Chemical Safety Board, I pledge to do just that.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here.