

Government Matters

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114th Congress Begins Attack on Public Protections with So-Called Regulatory Accountability Act

by **Katie Weatherford**

On Jan. 7, Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R-VA) introduced the [Regulatory Accountability Act of 2015](#) (H.R. 185). This measure would cripple our process for issuing and enforcing the rules that ensure we have clean air and water, safe food and consumer products, fair wages and safe workplaces, stable financial markets, state-of-the-art infrastructure, and so many other essential protections.

The Regulatory Accountability Act would not improve our regulatory process as big business groups and their anti-regulatory allies in Congress want you to believe. In reality, this bill would impose [74 new burdensome requirements](#) to the Administrative Procedure Act, increasing the demands of agencies already struggling to operate under Congress's latest budget cuts. It already takes several years for agencies to navigate the current regulatory process, yet this bill would require agencies to conduct even more analyses, meaning it would take even longer for agencies to issue important rules.

Here are just a few of the many troubling provisions included in this bill:

Imposes a Cost-Benefit Analysis Super-Mandate: The bill would require all federal agencies to conduct a cost-benefit analysis for all proposed rules and guidance, as well as *any potential alternatives* to the proposals or guidance. The bill would also expand the scope of these analyses by requiring agencies to include highly speculative estimates of all “indirect” costs and benefits for each option. Yet the bill does not even define what would qualify as an indirect cost.

Moreover, the legislation would require all agencies to perform this one-size-fits-all cost-benefit analysis, even though some statutes, such as the Clean Air Act and Occupational Safety and Health Act, currently bar agencies from relying on cost-benefit analysis. For example, the RAA would require the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to consider the cost of any new clean air rule, even though the Clean Air Act expressly prohibits EPA from factoring in cost when adopting standards to ensure we have clean, quality air to breathe.

Requires the “Least Costly” Rule: The bill would mandate that all federal agencies adopt the “least costly” rule out of all the alternatives considered. The only exception to this default rule is if the agency can demonstrate that the additional benefits to the rule justify the additional costs, although it is unclear what the agency would need to do to satisfy this requirement. Given that Congress has just recently cut agency budgets, agencies with already limited resources and rulemaking timelines may choose to adopt the least costly option when they lack resources to demonstrate that the additional benefits justify adopting a more costly rule.

Allows Big Business to Second-Guess Agency Scientists: The legislation would allow any interested person to petition an agency for a public hearing to challenge any information or evidence the agency relied on when drafting its proposed rule. The agency can only avoid the public hearing by throwing out the information being challenged. In effect, industry lobbyists could request a public hearing for every agency rulemaking to challenge any data that does not support the industry’s position, delaying the agency from finalizing a new rule.

Expands Judicial Review: Making matters worse, the RAA would lower the standard of judicial deference normally afforded to agency expertise. This would allow courts to review technical agency decisions and potentially overturn an agency’s rule based on the judge’s non-expert judgment.

History teaches us that failing to implement and enforce strong public protections costs lives, impairs our public health, jeopardizes our environment, and suppresses our economy. In a letter urging members of Congress to oppose the RAA of 2015, the [Coalition for Sensible Safeguards wrote](#), “The costs of deregulation should be obvious by now: the Wall Street economic collapse, the Upper Big Branch mine explosion in West Virginia, various food and product safety recalls, and numerous environmental disasters including the recent Dan River coal ash spill in North Carolina and the Freedom Industries chemical spill in West Virginia demonstrate the need for a regulatory system that protects the public, not corporate interests.”

This legislation represents nothing more than a backdoor effort to undermine public protections without having to be on the record opposing implementation of laws the American people support, like the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act. Instead of improving our system of public protections, the Regulatory Accountability Act would add numerous hurdles and delay to agency efforts to develop new

safeguards and give big business even more opportunities to interfere in this process. This would waste government resources that agencies need to achieve their missions.

[Contact your representatives](#) and urge them to oppose the Regulatory Accountability Act of 2015.

New York State Moves to Ban Fracking, Citing Health Concerns

by Amanda Frank

New York State officials gave residents an early Christmas present when they [moved to ban high-volume hydraulic fracturing](#) (or fracking) within state lines. The decision followed the release of a long-anticipated [public health study](#) that found many potential negative impacts from the natural gas drilling method. The announcement comes as a relief to state advocates who have been urging officials to ban fracking for years due to its environmental and public health risks.

New York State has had a [de facto ban on fracking since 2008](#) while officials awaited the release of an environmental impact report and a public health impact study. Environmental Commissioner Joe Martens and State Health Commissioner Howard Zucker shared the results of the public health study with Governor Andrew Cuomo during a cabinet meeting on Dec. 17. They highlighted the [“many red flags”](#) raised by fracking and noted the shortage of scientific studies examining these risks. Zucker concluded by saying that [he would not want own his child to play near fracking wells](#) and that he cannot support [high-volume hydraulic fracturing in New York](#).

Cuomo previously noted that he would defer to the experts when determining the fate of fracking in New York. The study and the advice from top environmental and health officials convinced him that the risks from fracking are too high.

Zucker said the Department of Environmental Conservation will [issue a ban on fracking early next year](#), following the release of a [legally binding environmental impact statement](#).

Fracking’s Many Risks

When New York first initiated its statewide fracking moratorium in 2008, relatively little was known about the health and environmental impacts of this drilling technique. Fracking injects water and chemicals deep underground to fracture bedrock and release trapped oil or natural gas. The technique is behind the oil and gas booms in states like North Dakota and Pennsylvania.

Industry continues to assure citizens that fracking is "safe," but a growing body of scientific evidence has raised significant concerns with the practice, with numerous studies identifying public health risks and environmental impacts. A recent study across five states detected [dangerous levels of cancer-causing substances](#) in the air near fracking sites. Moreover, a recent analysis of scientific studies, medical research, and government and industry reports concluded that [regulations are not capable of preventing these dangers](#).

New York's public health impact study, led by its Department of Health, focused on a wide scope of impacts, from land and water pollution to effects on communities.

The study identified several areas likely to be negatively impacted by fracking:

- **Air quality:** Methane emissions from natural gas wells have been well documented. Additionally, pollution from trucks traveling to and from well sites increases airborne emissions of benzene, a cancer-causing substance, and toxic particles. Such pollution contributes to climate change, increases cancer risks, and exacerbates respiratory diseases.
- **Water quality:** Faulty well construction can allow methane to escape into groundwater, polluting a critical drinking water source that many people depend on. Spills and inadequate waste disposal can also contaminate water sources.
- **Seismic activity:** Fracking has been linked to increased earthquakes in many regions, producing possible public safety concerns.
- **Community impacts:** Rapid construction and operation of fracking wells can be accompanied by increases in crime, traffic fatalities, and other disturbances that impact the quality of life for nearby communities.

The impact study relied on research conducted in other states where extensive fracking is currently taking place. As Zucker and Martens emphasize, more research is needed to fully understand the risks associated with fracking. In the meantime, New York State has chosen to play it safe.

New York Not Alone in Scrutinizing Fracking Hazards

Other states, including California and New Mexico, have [moratoriums on fracking or pending bans](#) on the practice. Additionally, several towns and cities across the country have banned fracking within their borders. Within New York State alone, 180 municipalities have issued bans or moratoriums, speaking to the force of the anti-fracking movement within the state.

New York State's decision comes just weeks after Maryland's governor [announced he will allow fracking in the state](#). Outgoing Governor Martin O'Malley is drafting strict regulations for fracking, which will go into effect after he leaves office in January. It remains to be seen whether these proposed rules – which some claim will be the strongest in the nation – will sufficiently protect against the many concerns outlined in New York's public health study.

First Bill Introduced in 114th Congress Attempts to Force Approval of Costly Keystone XL Pipeline

by Katie Weatherford

On the first day of the 114th Congress, Sens. John Hoeven (R-ND) and Joe Manchin (D-WV) introduced the [Keystone XL Pipeline Act](#) (S. 1), which would attempt to force the Obama administration to approve the controversial Keystone XL pipeline without first addressing its significant environmental impacts.

The bill would authorize the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline, bypassing a requirement that the company behind the project obtain a presidential permit. President Obama has declined to make a final decision on whether or not to issue the permit until after his administration has completed its review of the project's environmental and economic impacts. Also still pending is a decision from the Nebraska Supreme Court on the legality of the pipeline's proposed route through the state.

Instead of waiting for the White House to make a determination, the bill declares that an [environmental impact statement](#) issued by the State Department in January 2014 satisfies all legal requirements for environmental analyses, consultations, or reviews of the project. But the bill completely ignores the State Department's findings that greenhouse gases emitted from the [pipeline would contribute to climate change](#), and potential leaks would pose significant risks to water resources across the country.

To make matters worse, the pipeline would not substantially benefit our economy or create many jobs. According to the State Department's 2014 [report](#), the project would provide only 35 permanent and 15 temporary jobs after the roughly 16,100 direct temporary jobs have ended. Moreover, despite claims by the bill sponsors that the pipeline would help reduce the United States' dependence on foreign oil, most of the oil will be exported to other countries.

The proposed legislation is set to be reviewed by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, on which Hoeven and Manchin both serve. A committee hearing on the bill originally scheduled for Jan. 7 was [postponed due to an objection](#) by Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL). A committee [business meeting](#) scheduled for Jan. 8 to markup the bill may also be postponed, although no official announcement has yet been made. Once the bill reaches the Senate floor, it may face opposition from some Democrats opposed to the controversial pipeline. However, with the Republican Party now holding a majority of seats in both the Senate and House, this latest version of the bill is expected to pass swiftly in both chambers.

Congressional passage will not be the end of the story, however. White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest [signaled](#) this week that President Obama intends to veto the bill if it reaches his desk. As of Tuesday, Jan. 6, Hoeven indicated that he only had 63 votes for the bill, four short of the two-thirds majority needed to override a veto. There's still time for citizens to make their voices heard on this legislation. A quick e-mail or call to your senators' office can make a difference! Find your senators' e-mail addresses and numbers on the Senate's website:

http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm.

Breathing Easier Because of the Clean Air Act

by Scott Klinger

Since the passage of the Clean Air Act of 1970, the size of the economy has tripled, energy consumption has increased by half, and vehicle mileage has tripled. Even so, the six most commonly found airborne pollutants have decreased by more than half, air toxics from industrial plants have fallen by more than 70 percent, and new cars are 90 percent cleaner. Sound regulations and public protections don't impede economic growth, but they can and do improve the quality of our lives. Here's the story of one such piece of regulatory legislation, the nation's Clean Air Act.

Today is the birthday of the Clean Air Act, legislation signed into law by President Richard M. Nixon 44 years ago. This law is the centerpiece and platform for protecting the quality of the air we breathe. It took decades of work to get clean air laws passed, and over time, amendments have been added to strengthen our air quality standards and to respond to new risks. This is the story of how we established standards to protect a public good that we all need, but most of us take for granted.

The Public Demands Clean Air: Cities Take the Lead

In America, public complaints about filthy air began in the middle of the 19th century. As cities grew more densely populated, coal and oil became the major energy source, and large factories released all manner of waste from industrial production into the neighborhoods where they were located. In 1881, Chicago and Cincinnati, then major manufacturing centers and transportation hubs, became the first U.S. cities to limit air pollution.

At this point in time, Cincinnati was the nation's most densely populated city and one of the most industrialized. Factories churning out iron products, coupled with smoke-producing locomotives and river boats, produced particulate-laden air that choked the city's 300,000 residents. In response, [the southern Ohio city passed smoke control regulations in 1881](#), requiring operators of coal-fired boilers to adopt smoke prevention technologies. Most firms ignored the law, and air quality deteriorated further.

Two years later in 1883, St. Louis, another river town full of industry, learned from Cincinnati's experience and passed legislation that combined new rules limiting smoke emissions with an office of inspectors to measure and enforce the new law. Rules and the resources to enforce them worked. The citizens of St. Louis were soon breathing easier.

Seeing St. Louis' successes, citizens of Cincinnati began to clamor for their city to enforce its anti-pollution rules. In 1903, a new smoke ordinance was passed, and along with it, funding to hire a professional engineer to enforce the law.

The turn of the century heralded a new era of citizen activism (the progressive movement), and across the country, citizens organized to fight back against the consequences of unregulated industrialization. The Cincinnati Women's Club helped organize the Smoke Abatement League in 1906, a dues-paying organization, and were able to pressure city leaders to pass a third city anti-pollution law in 1907. The new law established a four-person Office of the Smoke Inspector and mandated that it use

umbrascopes, a new technological tool, to measure smoke throughout the city, and then look for the sources of pollution to demand that enterprises shift to safer alternatives.

In 1910, Massachusetts became the first state to adopt clean air regulations with laws regulating smoke emissions in Boston. Other cities and states followed these early efforts, and by the close of the Second World War, a patchwork of clean air rules and standards existed throughout the United States.

This prompted the federal government to act. In 1910, the Taft Administration created the [Office of Air Pollution](#) within the Interior Department's newly formed Bureau of Mines. The office, whose purpose was to control coal emissions, was largely inactive and was closed a few years later, to the delight of factory owners.

Tragedy Shifts Public Opinion and Increases Public Demand for Action

In October 1948, the nation's attention was intensely focused on the deadly problem of uncontrolled industrial pollutants when a thick cloud of smog hovered over the industrial town of Donora, Pennsylvania for five days. Donora residents were accustomed to the yellow smoke that poured from the town's zinc smelter. But in 1948, cold air aloft held the thick smog cloud in place. Townfolk asked the plant operators to suspend operations until the cloud dissipated. [They refused.](#)

The decision was deadly. The hospital was so overwhelmed by people in respiratory distress that the first floor of the town's hotel was converted into an emergency medical clinic, and the hotel's basement was turned into a make-shift morgue. By the time the toxic stew cleared five days later, 20 people were dead and 6,000 of the town's 14,000 residents had been sickened. The deadly effect of air pollution in Donora blared in headlines throughout the country.

Four years later, a black smog settled over London for five days in December. The smog from coal-burning homes and factories was being held down by a weather system; it was so thick that the city's buses could not run without people with lanterns walking ahead of the buses to guide them through the haze. An estimated 12,000 people died from exposure to the Black Smog of 1952. Some people point to this incident as the beginning of the modern environmental movement, but a national law to reduce coal use was not passed in the UK for another four years.

Federal Government Starts to Investigate

Public pressure for action intensified in the United States. In 1955, Congress passed the Air Pollution Act, a bill that provided the Public Health Service \$5 million annually to study the effects of air pollutants on human health and to propose solutions to address the problem.

Public awareness of the impact on industrial waste on human health and the natural world broke through to a new level with Rachel Carson's best-selling book, [Silent Spring](#), published in 1963. Carson translated and popularized a growing body of scientific evidence about the deadly dangers of toxic pollution and chemical exposures.

Within six months of the publication of *Silent Spring*, Congress passed the Clean Air Act of 1963, the first federal law to regulate air emissions. This act set emission standards for power plants, steel mills

and other industrial polluters. The law did not address mobile sources of pollutants stemming from autos and trucks, a significant part of the air pollution problem. It did, however, inaugurate the practice of the federal government providing funding to states to enforce anti-pollution standards, providing \$95 million (\$733 million in 2014 dollars) over three years to help states create their own air pollution control agencies.

But progress was slow, and the public in large cities was anxious for relief. Research was also showing the impact of lead emissions from gasoline on the health and IQ of small children in neighborhoods near freeways or heavily trafficked bridges. In 1965, the Motor Vehicle Pollution Control Act was passed, which added emissions limits on cars and trucks. This amendment also provided funds to study trans-boundary pollution, the crossing of polluted air from Canada and Mexico into the United States. Amendments in 1966 expanded local air pollution control programs. Significant amendments were added in 1967 to establish Air Quality Control regions in order to deal with the fact that air flow patterns do not respect political boundaries. This was the federal government's first acknowledgement that a patchwork of state and local standards was simply unable to deal with the problem; one national standard was needed. The 1967 amendments also imposed a timetable for implementation.

In 1970, in the midst of public protests about the Vietnam War and racial inequality, Sen. Gaylord Nelson (D-WI) called for the first Earth Day, a day of public demonstrations. On April 22, 1970, 20 million Americans in cities and towns across the land joined to demand changes to protect their environment.

Before the year ended, Congress passed the Clean Air Act of 1970, a sweeping re-write of the 1963 law. The 1970 law established National Ambient Air Quality Standards, New Source Performance Standards that strictly regulated emissions from both newly constructed plants and older plants (that had previously been grandfathered in and exempted from compliance), and strengthened the limits on emissions from cars and trucks. Enforcement of the Clean Air Act was given to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the nation's newest federal agency, which was formed earlier in the month. Importantly, it also gave citizens the right to sue any person, organization, or commercial entity for violation of clean air standards.

Backlash

In the wake of stronger regulation and enforcement of the nation's air quality standards, the air did get cleaner and respiratory diseases declined as a result. Yet industry continued to complain that the costs of complying with pollution controls reduced profits and competitiveness. In spite of business opposition, the EPA continues to monitor scientific research demonstrating the impact of various kinds of airborne pollutants on human health and nature and modifies standards accordingly.

Sometimes the science is ignored. In 1979, a National Academy of Sciences report found that lead from gasoline was the single largest pollutant in the atmosphere, but a year later, the Reagan administration tried to abandon a previously agreed-on phase-out of lead from gasoline. A huge public outcry ensued, and the administration was forced to speed up the phase-out timetable.

Business interests also use the courts to try to push back on air quality standards. In 1988, Wisconsin Electric Power sued the EPA on the grounds that its New Source Review standards did not set

appropriate tests to measure compliance. Two years later, the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals ruled mostly in the company's favor. Large polluters continue to challenge both the standards and enforcement measures that EPA has established.

In the 1990, the Clean Air Act was amended to address the new threats from "acid rain" and to respond to growing concern about climate change. The amendments set limits on the emissions of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) that destroy the earth's protective ozone layer and introduced the concept of Best Available Control Technology, which gives industry a range of options for compliance.

But even now, 44 years after the first legislation aimed at reducing air pollution was passed, coal-burning power plants are still operating in the U.S. – despite their known impacts on human health and the environment. Earlier this year, the EPA finally announced new limits on power plants – phased in over years. In another decade, the "dirtiest" coal burning power plants will likely be closed. This is progress. We need to transition the workers from these plants into new jobs and ensure the pensions of the retirees of these companies, but the closing of these plants is a win for clean air and public health.

Still Work to Be Done on Air Quality

Although there have been major and continuing improvements in our air quality over the last half century, nearly half of Americans today live in counties with levels of ozone or particulates that can be harmful to their health, according to the American Lung Association's [*2014 State of the Air*](#) report.

We need more monitoring of compliance with existing standards, not less. But the omnibus spending bill signed into law by President Obama earlier this month reduced the EPA's budget – again. Over the last five years, EPA's budget has been cut by 21 percent, even as the agency has been asked to take on new responsibilities for monitoring greenhouse gases. Already, the EPA workforce has been reduced to 1989 levels, even though the economy is twice the size it was back then.

Engage to Defend the Progress We've Made

Over the next two years, the federal Environmental Protection Agency and the rules and standards it created and enforced to improve our air quality will be under serious attack. It is interesting to note that the agency was created by a Republican president, in response to 20 million citizens turning out for Earth Day demonstrations all over the country. When the public wants something badly enough, partisanship has a way of dissipating.

We've come a long way from the days of yellow smog over Donora, Pennsylvania or the Black Smog that killed 12,000 in London. While we are unlikely to see a return to those gloomy days, every year, we see the human damage from more volatile weather patterns (Hurricane Sandy, wildfires and droughts in the West) that scientists tell us are the result of increasing carbon emissions. To protect the progress that's been made and continue our transition to cleaner energy sources, we'll need informed, engaged citizens like you. Pay attention. On this issue, it's up to all of us to protect our air today and for future generations.

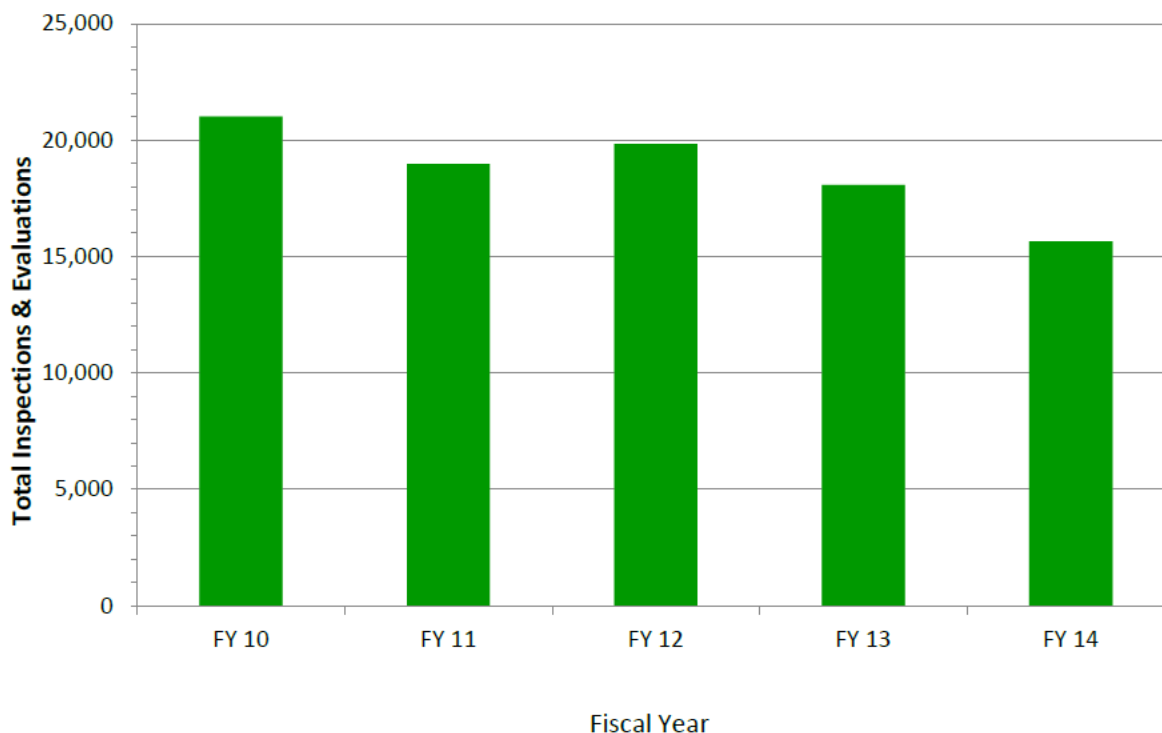
Downward Trend Continues in Enforcement of Environmental Standards

by Ronald White

Don't be surprised if you missed hearing about the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) annual report on its compliance and enforcement efforts for fiscal year (FY) 2014. The report, released the week before Christmas with little public or media attention, highlights what has become a disturbing downward trend over the past several years. Reductions in enforcement can mean less compliance with pollution control requirements and more exposure to toxic chemicals, putting human health and natural resources at risk.

The number of federal inspections carried out by EPA in FY 2014 was more than 25 percent below 2010 levels (see Figure 1).

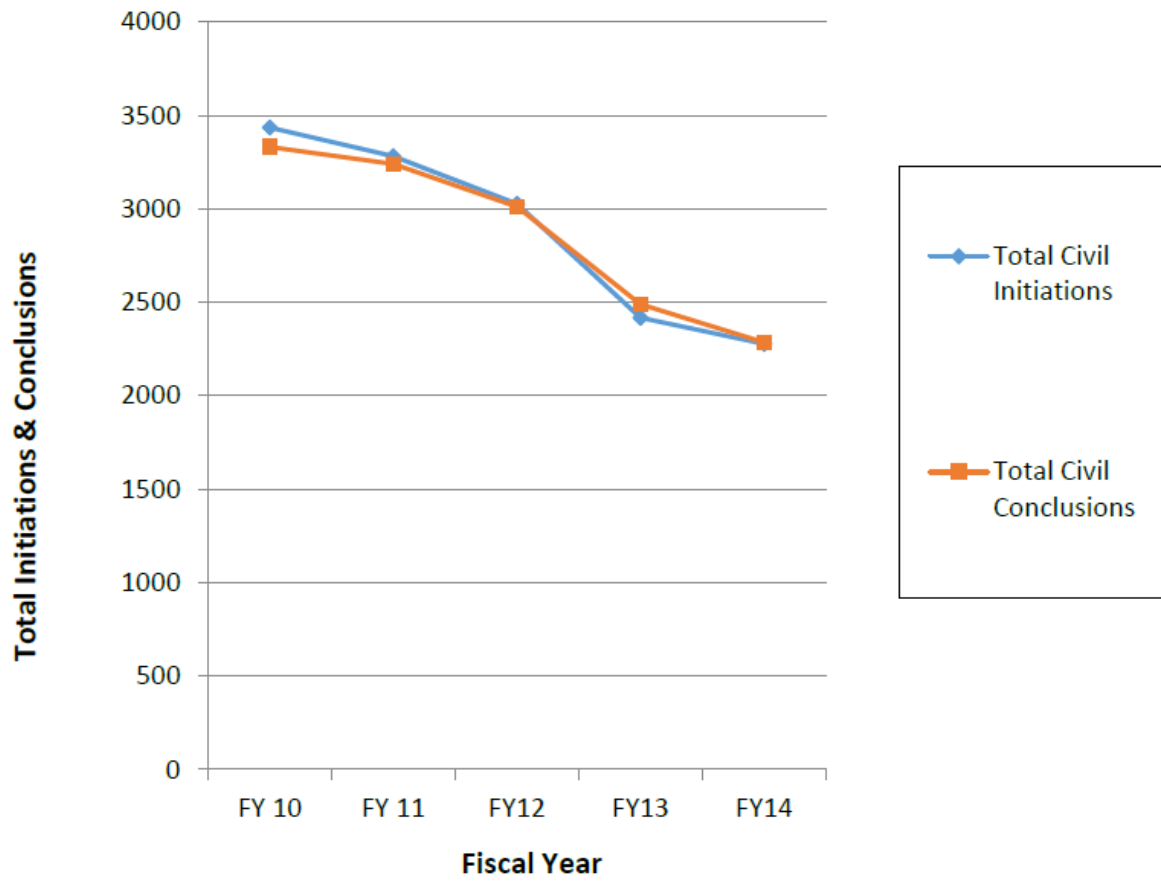
Figure 1. Federal Environmental Inspections, FY10-FY14



Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

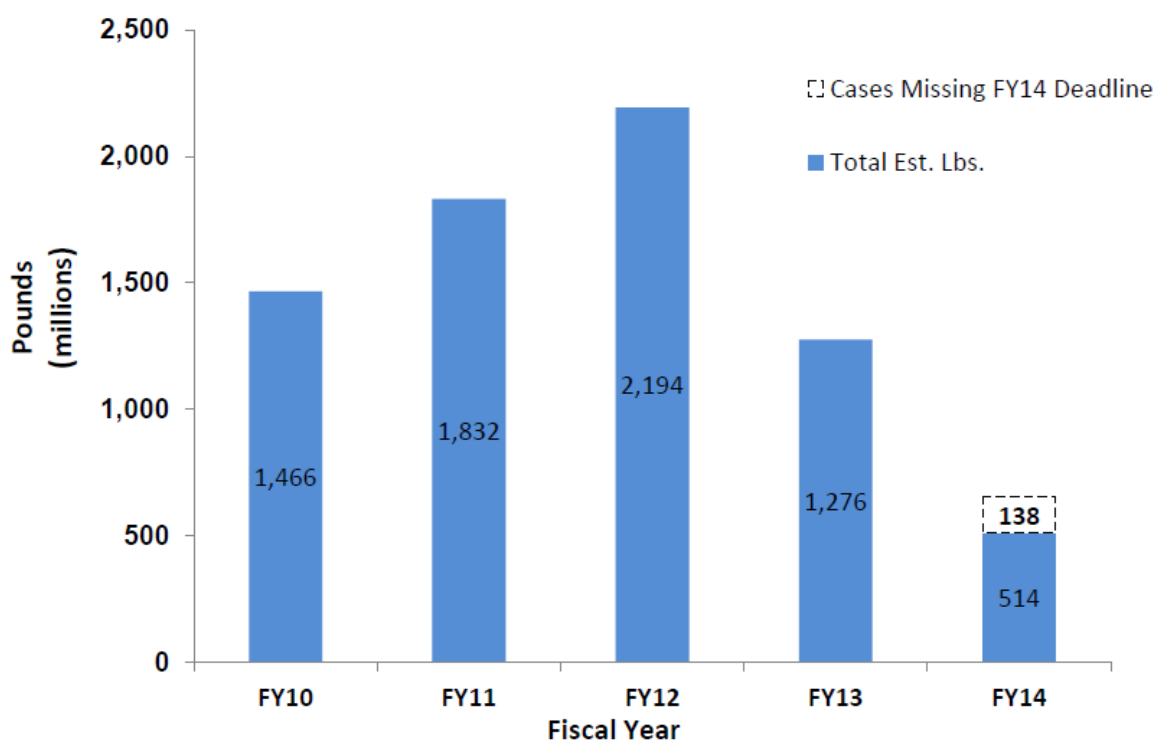
The number of enforcement cases that EPA brought against polluters for failing to comply with federal standards has continued a four-year decline, with particularly steep drops over the past two fiscal years (see Figure 2). The agency reported that the amount of pollution that companies committed to reduce, treat, or eliminate dropped more than 40 and 70 percent in fiscal years 2013 and 2014, respectively, from FY 2012 levels (see Figure 3).

Figure 2. Civil Enforcement Actions Against Polluters, Started and Resolved, FY10-FY14



Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Figure 3. Commitments to Reduce, Treat, or Eliminate Pollution, FY10-FY14



Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

This trend in reduced inspections and enforcement reflects what EPA notes in the report as “tight budget circumstances,” as well as the impact of the October 2013 federal government shutdown (FY 14 reductions only). EPA also attributes the reduction in inspections and enforcement to a focus on large pollution sources and bigger, more complex enforcement cases.

Clearly, cuts in EPA’s overall budget are undercutting the agency’s compliance and enforcement resources. These cuts reflect the beginning of what the agency projects in its current five-year [strategic plan](#) will be a 40 to 50 percent reduction in inspections and enforcement cases over mid-2000 levels. In fact, EPA’s projected FY 15 targets for inspections and new enforcement cases are already 26 and 31 percent below mid-2000 annual averages.

The EPA report says that relying on advanced monitoring technology as the cornerstone of its “[next generation](#)” [compliance strategy](#) will reduce the need for “boots on the ground” inspections, and increased transparency of monitoring results will provide incentives for companies to comply with rules. While both of these advances should improve compliance in theory, there is little hard evidence to date that they will replace the need for staff in the field. Transparency with consequences for noncompliance (fines) is more effective at ensuring compliance than transparency alone, and it is unclear that public health standards can be adequately enforced without physical inspections.

The irony is that the American people firmly believe we need *more* enforcement of regulations that protect public health and the environment, not less. A mid-2014 [poll](#) found that 87 percent of voters

support increased enforcement of laws and regulations, with large majorities supporting better enforcement of water pollution and air quality standards.

Those in industry and the new Congress [intent on undermining EPA rules](#) should take note of the American public's strong support for enforcement of public health protections. Republicans threatening to dramatically cut EPA's budget in the next two years should consider that cutting EPA's resources could have a political cost as well as environmental consequences.

Investing in Our Future: President's Proposal Promises Free Community College Tuition

by Jessica Schieder

The White House has released a proposal to allow students to attend community college for free for their first two years if they work hard and keep their grades up. The "[America's College Promise](#)" plan prioritizes public investments in more affordable education and could benefit as many as 9 million American students enrolled in community colleges across the country. The plan would save full-time students an average of \$3,800 in tuition each year.

"Put simply, what I'd like to do is to see the first two years of community college free for everybody who's willing to work for it—that's right, *free* for everybody who's willing to work for it," [explained](#) President Obama in a video message.

The president and CEO of the [American Association of Community Colleges](#) welcomed the announcement, saying, "College costs are a major concern for community college students. Though our sector provides the most affordable entry into higher education, our institutions also serve the neediest students... [M]ore students would see college as a viable option as a result of this initiative."

The plan requires that students attend college at least part-time, work toward completion of a degree program, and maintain a 2.5 GPA.

The White House hasn't released any details about the total cost of the program, but that hasn't stopped some from preemptively criticizing the scope of the proposal. One such critic, Rep. Diane Black (R-TN), said, "While the White House says that three quarters of the program would be paid for with federal funding, I have yet to hear what offsets, if any, would be proposed to ensure Americans are not saddled with greater debt and deficits as a result." But the president's proposal is modeled after the "[Tennessee Promise](#)" college affordability initiative that Black supports and her own state has successfully funded.

If the federal program saw full participation, it could provide a maximum of \$34.2 billion in benefits to students each year. Funding the proposal wouldn't be difficult if Congress made the decision to invest in our future. Just one example of where we could find these funds: allowing a [\\$42 billion package](#) of inefficient, almost exclusively corporate giveaways to expire. Black was among the members of Congress [who voted to pass that package](#) last month, but another extension would be needed to keep such giveaways in place. Getting rid of those tax breaks and other special favors would fully pay for the president's community college plan, with nearly \$8 billion left for other crucial public investments.

Today's students will be facing a job market where [35 percent of job openings](#) will require at least a Bachelor's degree. Ensuring that college is affordable for all responsible students is crucial to making sure Americans are ready to seize career opportunities and make a difference in society. The United States can easily afford to pick up the tab for hard-working community college students, but to do so, Congress must be willing to prioritize education above additional corporate giveaways.



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