

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH EPA ADMINISTRATOR GINA McCARTHY

SUBJECT: ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC HEALTH LEGACY OF
THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

MODERATOR: THOMAS BURR OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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THOMAS BURR: [sounds gavel] Welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Thomas Burr; I'm the Washington correspondent for the *Salt Lake Tribune* and the 109th President of the National Press Club. Our guest today is the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, Gina McCarthy. I would like to welcome our Public Radio and C-SPAN audiences, and want to remind you that you can follow the action on Twitter using the hashtag #NPCLive. That's #NPCLive.

Now it's time to introduce our head table guests. I'd ask that each of you stand briefly as your name is announced. Please hold your applause until I have finished introducing the entire table.

From your right, Frank Maisano, a partner at Bracewell Policy Resolution Group; Elizabeth McGowan, energy intelligence correspondent for Penton Media; Bill Loveless, energy columnist at *USA Today*; Matt Fritz, the Chief of Staff at the EPA; Emily Holden, ClimateWire reporter at *E&E News*; Frank Benenati, Associate Administrator for the Office of Public Affairs at the EPA; Donna Leinwand Leger, breaking news editor for *USA Today*.

Skipping over our speaker for just a moment, Rod Kuckro, a reporter at *E&E News* and a Press Club Speakers Committee member who arranged today's luncheon. Thank you, Rod. Maggie McCarey, the daughter of our speaker today; Melissa Burke, a reporter at *The Detroit News*; Elvina Nawaguna, a report at *CQ Roll Call* – I messed that up, didn't I? We had this conversation before, I was going to give that a try. [laughter] And Jack Williams, former *USA Today* weather editor and freelance science writer.

Thank you all. [applause]

EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy was last at this podium in September 2013 to unveil the Obama administration's opening bid to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Those rules to curb pollution from new power plants were a precursor of President Obama's Clean Power Plan, issued in 2015, which was designed to reduce carbon emissions from US power plants 32% 2005 levels by 2030.

The Clean Power Plan is America's chief commitment to the world in pursuit of achieving the Paris Accords' goals to combat global warming. But the fate of that rule, as well as many others issued by the EPA to address a range of environmental problems, is uncertain following the election. President-Elect Donald Trump has called climate change a hoax, and has vowed to roll back federal regulations seen as crippling to US businesses.

During her tenure, McCarthy has been in the crosshairs of Republican members of Congress and the fossil fuel industry for her perceived leadership of Obama's alleged "war on coal." But if you ask her, McCarthy will tell you that her critics have been wrong. As she sees it, her Agency's primary job is to protect the public health of Americans. That is not from just air and water pollution that can be seen with the naked eye, but from carbon dioxide, ozone, methane and lead, among others.

With about nine weeks left on the job, McCarthy remains resolute in EPA's mission. In a memo to EPA staff just after election day, she told them to continue working hard, writing that, "we're running not walking to the finish line of President Obama's presidency."

Today, we will learn more about what she has in mind and what her expectations are that those efforts will withstand expected challenges. Please give a warm National Press Club welcome to the EPA Administrator, Gina McCarthy. [applause]

GINA McCARTHY: Well, first of all, thank you, President Burr for your remarks. And I think you probably just gave mine as well. [laughter] So that's great, too. And thank you, everybody at the National Press Club for welcoming me back again. It is great to be here.

Now, a few of you in this room may be old enough to remember, although certainly I'm not, but there was a time when Congress actually passed a law with unanimous vote in the Senate and only one nay vote in the House. And I'll give you a hint: it was not the renaming of a post office. It was actually the Clean Air Act of 1970. It was a historic law that was signed by a Republican President, and it was a global turning point.

The Clean Air Act was actually passed in response to a changing world. It sought to build this country up, to look forward and to consider how our actions would impact people that we may never know or that we may ever see ourselves. Today, times are different. But the nature of change, well, hasn't changed. The world continues to be in motion, and it will keep changing regardless of the few who choose not to acknowledge it.

And while the world continues to change, EPA's mission continues to endure. Our mission is to protect public health and to safeguard the precious natural resources that we all need to survive and to thrive. Our task is timeless. It is non-partisan. It is essential to every single life. We cannot pursue liberty or happiness without clean air to breathe and clean water to drink. We cannot neglect to continue to support those hardworking Americans who get up every morning, they get their kids to school, they take extra class or they pick up an extra shift, and remember that the last thing they actually want to do is to listen to the rancor that too often characterizes our politics.

They may be fed up with what they hear out of Washington, but that in no way means that they don't care about what we do and what we don't do. They care about clean air. They care about safe drinking water. They care about fishable, swimmable rivers and streams. They care about safe places to live, to work and to play. Every one of those hardworking Americans, they care about having food that's free of harmful pesticides. How about products that are free of harmful toxics? In their neighborhoods' and kids' future, free from the dangers of climate change.

EPA's here because the American people demanded it. We will be here because they continue to demand it, because we stand between pollution and our people. Look, we've made incredible progress over the past five decades. Pollution today is less visible than it was in the good, old days when I grew up, when smokestacks spewed black clouds and rivers caught on fire.

But people expect us to deal with the pollution that they can no longer see, like air pollution that travels into our country or scoots across the states or chemicals that are present in our drinking water that nobody can articulate the name of because it's way too long to figure out. People expect us to do our jobs using the best science and research to define not only the challenges, but the solutions. People expect us to understand and use change as a catalyst for growth and prosperity.

If we do not, if we place rancor over action, if we betray the people who put us here, if we stubbornly deny the science and the change that is happening around us, we will fall victim to our own paralysis. Science tells us that there is no bigger threat to American progress and prosperity than the threat of global climate change. And if you take absolutely nothing else from my speech today, take this: The train to a global clean energy future has already left the station.

So we have a choice. We can choose to get on board and to actually provide leadership, or we can choose to be left behind to stand stubbornly still. When presented with that choice, President Obama chose leadership. He chose action. He chose a calculated investment in our collective future.

President Obama recognizes that the inevitability of our clean energy future is bigger than any one person or any one nation. The facts today paint a very clear picture. Climate change is among the most significant public health, economic and security challenges that we have ever faced as a nation or as a world. And under his administration, with an economic

recession the likes of which we have never seen since the 1930s, he had the foresight to invest in solar and wind and clean energy and clean auto manufacturing, to set a course for strong domestic action, positioning the US to actually lead the way to securing a historic international agreement.

And he was right. The Paris agreement was negotiated and it is now in full force. And EPA will continue to be essential to cutting carbon pollution in the United States and making good on our global leadership. We've set greenhouse gas standards for cars and trucks that slash carbon pollution and – guess what? – save money for people at the pump, while it boosted the auto industry from near bankruptcy to increases in both sales and jobs here in the United States.

We've set methane standards for landfills and new oil and gas production units, and we are gathering the data necessary to set standards on existing ones.

We helped broker two historic international agreements to lower carbon emissions from aircraft. And something else that I am incredibly proud of, we've led the United States delegation that successfully amended the Montreal Protocol, an international agreement to reduce hydrofluorocarbons. They are highly potent greenhouse gases.

And this one agreement, in and of itself, will avoid up to 80 billion metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions. Folks, that is equivalent to ten years of US emissions. And the businesses like it. They were there pushing for it. They celebrated in the end when we got it over the finish line.

And of course, we took historic action to set sensible carbon pollution limits at our largest stationary sources, our power plants, which we call the Clean Power Plan. Now, I've heard some people talk about EPA's Clean Power Plan like it's the driving force behind this country's transition to clean energy. And the reality is that those folks give us too much credit. The CPP was designed to follow the clean energy transition that was already under way, the one that the energy market depends on and the one that the energy market will continue to demand.

Just look at where the US energy sector is now. In 2014 alone, clean energy investment increased by 14%. That's five times greater growth than the rest of the US economy. US power plant CO2 emissions in 2015 were about 24% below 2005 levels, already well on the way to the CPP's 2030 targets.

2015 emissions were about the same as the CPP's first-year goal in 2022 – in 2015! That's a full seven years ahead of schedule. Twenty-four states had lower emissions in 2015 than their 2022 annual goal the first year of compliance in the CPP, including states like Ohio, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and South Dakota.

And the Energy Information Agency estimates that almost 70% of new utility-scale generating capacity expected to come on line in 2016 will actually be zero-emitting, mostly solar and wind.

So folks, clearly there is more going on in our world and our energy sector than the CPP can account for. And look, I'm really not trying to say that the CPP isn't important; you know that. I love it. I think it's great. But the truth is that if I were to stand here and explain the significance and virtues of the Clean Power Plan, it would keep you here for quite a lengthy period of time, and I can't fit it in to a sound bite that I do have time for. And it certainly doesn't fit in to a tweet; I've tried it, I know. [laughter]

But I truly believe, guided by President Obama's deliberate vision, that history will show that the Clean Power Plan marked a turning point in American climate leadership, a point where our country stepped up to the plate and delivered, and the rest of the world followed us. It's a sign of US commitment. It's a market signal to investors and to innovators. And it brings stability and certainty to the energy sector, and to the world.

But the global transition to a low carbon economy is much more than any one regulation. The energy market and the commitment of the private sector is what is driving and will continue to drive this inevitable journey. And that journey is consistent with virtually every nation's understanding of climate science and our obligation to protect our children's futures.

We're in a spectacularly different place today than we were when President Obama took office. Before, developing countries would point a finger at us; now they're wondering if the US will turn its back on science and be left behind. That is the choice that we face.

And as the President said, the inevitability of our clean energy future is again bigger than any one person or one nation, and it must be guided by a simple, but profound truth. We don't have to choose between economy or environment. We can and we must choose both.

The truth has been the foundation of all of the progress that we have made at EPA. This truth. And we have a track record to show for it. Over the past eight years under President Obama's leadership, we have taken tremendous strides forward in economic growth. Eight years of economic expansion and a record increase in median incomes. And, at the same time, we have made incredible progress in cutting pollution and protecting public health. And, at the same time, this President has understood and stood up and said so clearly that a clean, healthy environment is not a luxury. It's not window dressing, folks. It is a right. It is the foundation of our economy and our lives.

Our work to cut pollution must always focus not only on what our nation needs as a whole, but also on those who have been disproportionately hurt, disadvantaged communities that bear the burden of environmental injustice. And in the past eight years, we have paid attention not only to our national challenges, but our ability and our willingness and our effort to partner with our states, our local communities and our tribes.

We set measurable, commonsense standards. Let me just tell you about a few of them. We have reduced mercury emissions from power plants and protected more people from harmful levels of ozone and particulate matter in our air. We've lowered sulfur content

in fuels and pollution from our cars. We've made states accountable for harmful levels of air pollution that they send downwind. We've required fence-line monitors around refineries. We've made progress in cleaning up our ports.

We have clarified the jurisdictional boundaries of the Clean Air Act; 40 years of work, we finally did it. We reduced toxic effluent from power plants and set new standards for the management of coal ash. We've provided farm workers with the same level of protection that other workers have enjoyed for many years. And we made progress in restoring iconic water bodies like our precious Chesapeake Bay and the Great Lakes.

And we've made sure these standards are met with enforcement that put people first. Like the Deepwater Horizon spill settlements that provided \$20 billion to restore and protect the Gulf. Or the Volkswagen settlement that ensures \$14 billion to compensate consumers to reduce pollution and to invest in an infrastructure for zero-emitting vehicles.

And we've leveraged the power of information to broaden and empower our environmental enterprise in this country. Through programs like Energy Star, WaterSense and Safer Choice, they empower consumers to grow demand, as well as the market for greener products through their purchases. And EPA apps like How's My Waterway, AirNOW and School IQ Assessment. Check them out. These are tools that you can use to get in the game, folks, to protect yourselves, to actually make a difference in your own lives and a difference in your neighbors' lives.

We have tools like our climate adaptation [audio malfunction] wizard. These are things that help communities, as well as businesses, understand how they can protect themselves and find the least cost and most effective way to become an environmental steward.

We unlock the power of citizen science to help us protect more people using people power, not money. Transparent, readily accessible information, new monitoring technologies, like our really cool Village Green bench. Go sit on one. They're around. They actually double as an air monitor, so people can see what their local air quality looks like. And they have cameras now that we are sharing with states and communities that can literally see pollution that otherwise would be invisible, like leaks from storage tanks. That's still just as dangerous as those smokestacks spewing out black smoke.

We've deepened the focus on vulnerable communities that have been left behind. Through our work with tribes, we are recognizing tribal treaty rights in the work that we are doing. And our work to make a visible difference in communities that has already reached every region of this country. And our work looking ahead, such as our EJ 2020 plan or our place-based efforts that have been so successful, where we've collaborated with other federal partners to support communities in their efforts to become more sustainable like our Local Foods, Local Places.

And of course, we've increased our attention on drinking water. Lessons learned in Flint are being shared across this nation so we can better prepare to finish the job on

addressing legacy contaminants, we can face the new ones, and we can fix our aging infrastructure.

You know, doing more, doing better, that is EPA's constant aspiration. It's also the nature of our democracy. We made progress using science and the law, and we continue to be responsive to change. We do not oppose it. That's how EPA was born. That's how our mission will exist far beyond the bounds of electoral cycles. Because at its core, EPA embraces the American ideal, *E pluribus unum* – of many, come one.

Because pollution and health risks, they do not discriminate. And we, like this nation, will always be a place where we draw strength from our differences. And under this President's watch, we have engaged more Americans than ever in the work that we do. Millions have informed our climate rules. And vast majorities simply want us to protect them and their children's future by following real science and the law.

Mothers of every color have banded together to ensure their voices are heard. And leaders of all faiths have come into EPA and beyond speaking about our moral obligation to take climate action. Hispanic and African American voices have been speaking up. They're reminding us that they are way too often the ones at risk when we fail to act appropriately. Businesses big and small are making the risks of inaction very clear and calling attention to the opportunities that are sitting in front of us to boost our economy and create new sectors of jobs.

And EPA has listened to those voices. I'm so proud of the work we've done to reach a more diverse constituency, to make EPA more accessible, to make it a place where more voices can be heard and make a difference; where communities concerned about their health and, yes, businesses concerned about their operations are welcomed into the decision process to work with us hand in hand.

I know that there's a lot of anxiety these days, but I am very hopeful for the future for a few reasons, and let me articulate them. EPA has done its job well. And the environmental enterprise is more inclusive and more effective than it has ever been. We have energized the American people who will demand not only clean air and clean water for their children, they will demand a stable planet as well.

We've created the kind of resonance that motivates a generation of young people, a familiar movement that resembles times past when millions of voices, standing up and speaking out. That is what changed the country's trajectory and that is what is going to keep us moving towards a low carbon future.

And I'm hopeful, because in 2016 – that was just this year, folks – a bill passed on a voice vote in the Senate and in the House, with only 12 nay votes. Do you believe it? It was an environmental bill. Do we all know that one was? And it's not the naming of a post office. [laughter] It was the Lautenberg Chemical Safety Act. That is the first update to an environmental statute in 20 years. Congress overwhelmingly came together – *this* Congress – to give the EPA more authority to protect the American people from dangerous chemicals.

When he signed the bill into law, President Obama said, and I quote: "This is proof that here in Washington, things can work. It's possible. We can keep families safe and unleash the engine of American innovation. We can protect the planet and keep creating jobs. If we can get this bill done, it means that somewhere out there on the horizon we can make our politics less toxic as well."

I think President Obama was right, although we may have a ways to go on his last point. But we can make things work in Washington if we choose to focus on the job we're given. For EPA, it's protecting the health of the people that we have pledged to serve.

I want to end with this. I want to thank the unsung heroes that I have had the privilege of working with at EPA: The scientists, the economists, the policy people, the lawyers, the regulators who have devoted their lives to public service. And to the outside advocates, the businesses, the innovators and the industry visionaries. We need you. We still need you. We will always need you.

I know who you are. I know you place science and service above partisanship. I've seen what you're capable of, and that's why I'm so certain that our future will be brighter and healthier and more just for all.

Thank you very much. [applause]

MR. BURR: Thank you, ma'am. We have a lot of questions to get through, but I think one of the top on our minds here, you sort of addressed this, but I want to get back to it. How do you react to the prospect that the causes you've worked so hard on for the last eight years are threatened to be overturned next year by a series of executive orders?

MS. McCARTHY: Well, I am, as I said, I am very confident in the work we've done. There has been not progress through executive orders, but executive authorities. I mentioned the Clean Air Act, and we have taken a lot of steps moving forward. I think they're sound, reasonable steps. I'm looking forward to a smooth transition and getting folks in here so they can see the breadth of the work in the Agency and how well we've done our job.

MR. BURR: Have you met with anyone from the Trump transition team yet? Have you been in contact with them?

MS. McCARTHY: We have not been contacted, no.

MR. BURR: Let's talk about the laws for a second. You were talking about the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act. You have a Republican White House soon in January, a majority Republican House and Senate. Are you concerned that some of those laws could be repealed, even going back to those two?

MS. McCARTHY: Well, I think if you go back and look at— I tried to make it pretty

clear. What we do is really protect public health and precious natural resources. It is a mission I think that is still endures. We have been very successful over five decades in avoiding partisan politics as much as possible, to remind folks that it really doesn't matter if you're a Republican or a Democrat, you still want your kids to be healthy and their future to be sound.

So I think we'll look at those. Those have stood the test of time for a long time, and I'm pretty confident that the Agency is doing its work well and people will still want the same things that they've always wanted. And that is a bright future for their kids.

MR. BURR: Still, President-Elect Trump has promised to undo many environmental regulations and climate change regulations. If you had to beg them to spare one, do you have one on top of your mind? [laughter]

MS. McCARTHY: You're asking me to pick among my children? [laughter] Maggie, I can't do that, can I? I think we're going to have to wait and see. My job right now is to do a smooth transition. That's what the President has told us, that is my commitment. We'll do that. We'll tell people what's going on in the Agency. If you sit in my shoes every day, you see the breadth of what that Agency does. You see how hard we work. You pick up the phone and realize that every day there's a new issue or problem or concern that an individual has, a community has. Work that the states don't have the resources or the technical capacity to do. It's really hard not to respond to those calls for help. And I expect that that will continue and the next administration will respond.

MR. BURR: We talked about this in the introduction, but the memo you sent your staff after election day said you wanted to run to the finish line of the Obama presidency. What specifically do you plan to accomplish in the next nine weeks?

MS. McCARTHY: Do you really expect me to detail that? [laughter]

MR. BURR: Specifically.

MS. McCARTHY: Yeah, specifically! Well, I don't have any secrets. Our agenda is out there. We have a lot of work to do. I think the point of the President is that there's one President at a time, and I'm working for this one, and I'm going to do that work, and I'm going to continue with it.

And the Agency right now is, we're focused on the work ahead and the work we have to do. That's the best place for the people in the Agency to be, and that's what we're doing right now.

PROTESTER: It has to be talked about. When you woke up this morning in your warm bed, did you think of the 160 people who were suffering hypothermia from the actions of last night? You say your mission is to protect the public's health and its planet. If that is your mission, why are you silent on Standing Rock? You say you care about safe places; why are indigenous people exempt from that safety?

MR. BURR: Ma'am, thank you very much. I think you've made your point. Just a reminder to those watching online or on C-SPAN, our lunches are open to the public, so this is not necessarily a reporter standing up right now. Thank you, ma'am.

PROTESTER: [simultaneous conversation] Why haven't you jumped on it? [simultaneous conversation] when it comes to indigenous people. You mentioned tribal relationships three times. Where are you when it comes to Standing Rock? Where are you?

MR. BURR: Thank you, ma'am.

PROTESTER: Thank you.

MR. BURR: I'm going to get back to that in a little bit, but let's go to the next question. Because we were talking about the mood of the EPA employees, what would you say the mood is? Is there a concern with your employees, especially the staff, the bureaucratic staff who's been there, the hardworking merit staff about rolling back the work they've done?

MS. McCARTHY: We call them career staff, rather than bureaucratic.

MR. BURR: Thank you, that's probably the better word.

MS. McCARTHY: I like the word bureaucrat, but many people think of it differently. My folks, they're doing fine. Most of them have been through transitions before. They are working with one another, just continuing to hunker down and do their job. They're pretty confident that the mission of EPA is a good one and it will be enduring, and they will be able to continue to do the work of the Agency.

MR. BURR: Thank you. Let's go back to your speech. Name the top three, if you can, of the accomplishments you believe you've made, the top three achievements.

MS. McCARTHY: Well, again, you're asking me to pick between my children. I spent my first four years in the administration working in the Air program. So I probably have more familiarity and love with that work. But we do a breadth of work. I'll give you a couple.

I actually, when I came in here, as you all know I'm from New England— [laughter]

MR. BURR: We couldn't tell at all. Very shocked to hear that.

MS. McCARTHY: Specifically anywhere in particular, you think? [laughter] And I came in with a couple of rules that I knew were on the plate that I wanted to get over the finish line. One of them was a mercury and air toxic standard. I really thought it was time, under the Clean Air Act, somebody thought that these old units with no really modern

controls on them would somehow have faded out. But they didn't. And so, I think lowering the toxics that our kids are so vulnerable to, it was really important to me.

But the other one really was the Cross-State Pollution Rule, which if you remember, we didn't do so well the first time and ended up doing really well on appeal. And so, that was really important to me, because in the New England area, we get a lot of that downwind air that comes from upwind sources and we spend an awful lot of resources to make sure that our air that we produce in New England is clean. We really felt that an equity issue and a justice issue required that folks do the best they could everywhere. And we, I think, did it in a way that's very reasonable and cost effective by designing a trading program around that.

So I'm pretty proud of that one. Having said that, I really, really am happy that we got the Clean Water Rule over the finish line. And I'm looking forward to the Agency defending it in court. I think that we should all be embarrassed to have a law that old with twice getting yelled at by the Supreme Court and never addressing fundamentally the [audio malfunction] And I worked pretty hard myself on that individually when I was Administrator, to make sure that we were not just being respectful of the agricultural industry, but making sure that it provided them the clarity that they need as well. I think it's a great rule, and I'm really proud of it.

MR. BURR: I don't want to reward protesters, but it is a valid question. Can you talk to me about your concerns and your thoughts on the indigenous people's concerns about the Standing Rock pipeline?

MS. McCARTHY: Well, the one thing I will tell you is that I have been to Standing Rock and met with the tribal council. The President of the United States has been to Standing Rock and met with the council. So it is not an issue that is off our radar screen in any way. And I indicated, I think in my speech, how respectful I am of the interests of tribes. I know that folks are directly involved with that with the administration. I'll leave the details to them.

But if you, I think, go to those tribes, you'll see that I have spent a great deal of my professional time making sure that we pay attention to the tribes. Not just Standing Rock. It's one of the things you get to see when your Administrator that you don't get to see otherwise. And that is a realization that many tribes don't have drinking water, that many tribes don't have safe places to live. And it is an eye-opening experience when you realize some of these challenges.

And we've spent a great deal of time, not just recognizing those, but actually being in a leadership position among federal agencies to be responsive to tribal needs. And I'm really proud of the work we've done.

MR. BURR: Thank you, ma'am. Here's another example of an outstanding issue. Residents of a suburban St. Louis community, Bridgeton, have been awaiting EPA's cleanup plans for West Lake landfill that contains nuclear waste from the Manhattan Project. The residents consider it a hazardous environmental risk. Will that cleanup plan be in place before you leave office, or will it be left to the Trump administration?

MS. McCARTHY: I think you know we've been working there. I don't want folks to think that because a plan, which we call a record of decision, a final decision, means that we haven't been hanging out there and doing the work we're supposed to do, because we have. We've done extensive work. We've done remedial work to take care of the biggest challenges. I've met, actually, with some of the mothers from that area, and they've come in and we've talked about what we can do.

So I do not know the exact timing. We're confident that it's going to come soon. But I do know that it's a specific concern of that community. And we've been working with the state of Missouri, not just to address that landfill, but it is an area where this landfill isn't the only thing to worry about in terms of impact on the environment in that area. And we've been doing an awful lot of work looking at the area as well as just this small landfill.

But it's a big deal for that community, and we're being as responsive as we can. And we'll get the record of decision as quickly as we can.

MR. BURR: Thank you. Some are worried about a protective action guide regarding radioactive water in an emergency. Why is the EPA proposing this? And does that protective action guide put the public at risk?

MS. McCARTHY: There's two ways in which we're looking at this protective action guide, or PAG. And let me explain this to you. And I'll explain it from the viewpoint of somebody who worked at states for 17 years, ones that actually had nuclear facilities in them.

This guideline is a guideline to sort of explain to states what they should do when an emergency happens, when there is a release of radioactive material, and how do you manage that situation, knowing full well that it's going to take time to resolve the situation.

So there's a guideline for water, but there's a whole other large guidance document that we're hoping to get out soon that talks about all the other things that states should do, based on just our recommendation, because we have quite a bit of expertise in this area. And states have been driven crazy because it's been years since anyone updated it, and because they know that we have more at issue now in terms of radiation; we have the little bombs that can happen. And we need to update it. We deserve to give them the information.

So we are in the finals of updating that larger effort. And there is a smaller piece, which is the drinking water issue. And let me tell you where this came in. Because I don't want anyone to think that we are changing our standards for drinking water. That is not the case. What we are trying to do is figure out how to actually start transitioning from a case where everybody is in their house and hunkered down and can't drink drinking water, to being able to understand what exposures in a temporary way would allow life to continue, but not present a hazard to those individuals.

So we are providing the best information we can in those transition days, not sending a signal that we think that those numbers should be the standard for drinking water. It clearly shouldn't be. But we do have to recognize that you can't go from zero to 90 without figuring out how you start ramping up again and how we provide the right recommendation.

And a lot of this information and this concern came out of Japan in the Fukushima incident. It didn't get resolved quickly. There were people that were left not knowing what to do. And we thought that it was necessary to actually provide this information. Again, we'll see where it goes, and it's in the process. But we're doing the best we can to provide advice in a situation that is certainly, we hope, nobody will ever face in the United States.

MR. BURR: Since we're on drinking water for a second, a recent Inspector General report was critical of the EPA's actions or inactions on Flint, Michigan. What changes are under way at EPA to respond to the IG report and ensure that the Agency is more proactive in situations similar to Flint? And what would you advise your successor to do differently in situations like Flint?

MS. McCARTHY: Well, I think I mentioned this a little bit. As you know, we certainly still have a large presence in Flint. The good news is we've made a lot of progress. But it continues to be a very challenging situation. And we have learned some lessons in Flint. And so, you will see very shortly that we are going to come out with a drinking water action plan, because when Flint happened, shortly after that we began national discussions with all of the stakeholders because there are a number of shrinking cities like Flint that have too large a system. And when you have a large drinking water system, it's not a good thing because it means there's stagnant water in those pipes and you don't want that.

So how we manage those situations is going to be important. But one of the other lessons in Flint is that it's very clear that Flint was a community that was disinvested in. They lost their manufacturing base. That's why they're shrinking. Their ability to be able to economically manage their system is under threat, even if we— sorry, I shouldn't say even. Since we're getting it to the levels that it needs to be. And I think we have that challenge all across the United States, is how do we invest in infrastructure, not simply for new infrastructure, but how we look at the infrastructure that exists that is either decaying, too big, needs additional treatment in the case of drinking water, and how do we move that forward.

So we have completed many rounds of focus groups. We have a plan that we're getting ready to release shortly. And that will hopefully be a lessons-learned and a path forward, not just to address Lead and Copper Rule, which we know needs to be updated, but also to figure out a path forward to look at how we begin the reinvestment, how much we need, and how we keep up with both drinking water and waste water facilities.

We've become very accustomed to not having to worry about drinking water and waste water. We can no longer have that luxury.

MR. BURR: Let me follow up on that. What is the recent revision of the EPA's administrative order with the state of Michigan and the city of Flint reflect how the EPA's relationship with state and local agencies has changed?

MS. McCARTHY: Well, I think one of the things we need to make sure that we do is appropriate oversight as aggressively as we can. And so, the order, the enforcement order was recently updated. We actually did an enforcement order about a year ago. We're doing one again, and it's because the situation in Flint is shifting. The city is making decisions about where its source water is going to come from. And in order to make sure that the city and the state are planning appropriately, we just wanted to make sure that it was in writing that we need a three months' window to actually test any new water system and the ability of their treatment facility to handle it, because we didn't want what happened before. Which was, unbeknownst to us, the system gets changed, it is not properly tested, it is not properly managed, and we ended up with the situation in Flint. We did not want that to happen again.

So it's all really, the change in the order is really all about that. It was not a surprise to either the city or the state. We are working with them very closely. But if there's one lesson I've learned, is that when it comes to drinking water, you put it in writing and you make it as tough as you can. And that's what that is.

MR. BURR: I'm going to switch subjects for a second. How soon can we expect to see the EPA's final report on hydraulic fracturing and drinking water, and whether this one incorporates the recommendations from the EPA's science advisory board that the EPA clarify its overarching conclusion that no systemic link exists between hydraulic fracturing and water contamination. That was a mouthful there.

MS. McCARTHY: I know, it's not easy to say, hydraulic fracturing. It's much easier to just say fracking. We are looking at trying to wrap that up soon. I've certainly been advised about where we are now. We're certainly going to listen to the direction of the science advisory board. This was one science advisory board that was as fractured as the subject matter. It sort of came up with many different conclusions, some of which conflict with one another. But we know what our job is, and we're going to be finalizing that.

And while I can't tell you the direction it is going to take, we are going to listen to all sides in terms of what the members thought, and we'll come to the best decision that we can. But again, remember, this is not a policy document. It is a science document. And there was some clear indications from the science advisory board that we needed to do a better job at explaining the science. And while I've been briefed on it, it's my scientists that are going to make these decisions.

MR. BURR: Let's talk about one of those disagreements as well. What do you consider the definition of widespread impacts? And which impacts does the EPA find accessible, and why?

MS. McCARTHY: Well, I mean, you're asking the same questions that I think much of the discussion the science advisory board revolved around. You know, the purpose of the

hydrofracking study was that we were asked to do this. And told to do this. And the purpose of it was basically to identify, basically to look at the water cycle and identify what place in that water cycle and in the hydrofracking operation could pose a risk to drinking water. It was very clearly done in a way that it was just a science and technical document about what does the data show us, and what do we know.

And so, the challenge for us is to characterize what we know, and to make sure that that's not overcharacterized as we know everything. Because our data is limited and how we project that and clarify that in this report is what we're going to accomplish.

MR. BURR: With President-Elect Trump openly admitting to denying climate change, and likely appointing an EPA administrator who is a climate denier, possibly, what steps are you taking in your final months of office to ensure communities will be protected from fracking? This questioner wants to know in particular, will you meet with families from Delmont, Pennsylvania, or Pavillion, Wyoming? They say water's been impacted by fracking.

MS. McCARTHY: EPA folks in the regions have been certainly working on this issue. And we all know, and the President has said it, this inexpensive natural gas has been one of the factors that really changed the energy sector and how it's heading. But we all know it has to be done safe and responsibility. This report is going to be an opportunity for people to know where the impacts could happen, what we've already seen so that steps can be taken.

At this point in the administration, I think that's what we're trying to accomplish, is to be as clear as possible.

MR. BURR: Without using the word "soon," when will the EPA release its rule to regulate methane emissions from existing oil and gas infrastructure?

MS. McCARTHY: I don't know. [laughter] It was different; I followed the rules. The existing, just so everybody understands. What EPA has recently done is sent thousands of requests for information— actually, not requests. We are asking for information that's consistent with our legal authorities to gather it, so that we can take that data and understand where methane is being emitted, things like what kind of technologies are available to minimize that, as well as the costs associated with that, so that we can continue to move forward on another rule making.

But I don't have a timeline for this to be done. If you look at it, it's going to be done in phases, which will give information to the Agency in a few months. But it will continue to go on for quite a lengthy period of time.

One of the things that I think people don't understand is that when we do a rule, we regulate existing, we are looking at requirements that ask us not just what can you reduce, but what are the costs, what are the technology choices. And in the area of oil and gas development, it's been going on for ever. And there are so many different types of pieces of

equipment that are very challenging. And we want to make sure that if we do a— when we do a rule, that'll it be done well.

So it is very challenging. And it can be done in phases, or the next administration can make other choices.

MR. BURR: You're here today to talk about what you did do at the EPA, but looking back, is there any climate or environmental action you regret not taking or not starting sooner?

MS. McCARTHY: All of them. The one thing I do regret is that, I know everybody knows that I had a fairly lengthy process of getting confirmed by the legislature for this position by the Senate. I also had a fairly lengthy time getting into the Agency in the first place as an assistant administrator. I think that was just because it takes a long time.

One of the things I regretted was that there was an announcement in the Rose Garden when the President stood up and talked about granting California its waiver and moving forward with the endangerment finding for light duty vehicles, which was really the big first way in which the Agency began to use the Clean Air Act to regulate greenhouse gases. I was really ticked off that I wasn't there. [laughter] That's what I regret. I remember sitting at home, watching it, going GRRR! [laughter] That's mine! It wasn't.

MR. BURR: What would you advise your state colleagues to do if the EPA and Congress, they believe, are working against their interests or their environmental goals?

MS. McCARTHY: Well, in any democracy, everybody has a right to their own opinion and their voices should be heard. I think EPA's done, I think, over the past eight years, a wonderful job looking at what the science is, what the facts are. I think that folks should continue to speak if they disagree and don't think people are paying attention.

But that's the democratic process. That's what we should follow.

MR. BURR: Do you think, can and will states and cities, corporations fill the gap left in US climate leadership if they don't believe Trump is taking it the right way?

MS. McCARTHY: I do. I actually do. And I think there are lots of people here that will confirm this. Listen, there's two reasons why I think that progress will continue. There's many reasons why, but the two that answer this question are, number one, if you've worked at the state level or the local level, you cannot run away from people. You have to make decisions, not based on politics, but based on what your people are demanding of you, or you will be the shortest-lived municipal servant in the history of mankind.

And so, people really are worried about the impacts of climate, they're already feeling there are thousands of mayors who have signed climate pledges. They are working hard. We've provided tools for them to see how they would adapt to a changing climate, because they're afraid. They're afraid of wildfires. They're afraid of floods. They're afraid of running

out of drinking water, which is particularly frightening. And these things are happening all across the country. And so, mayors will continue to speak up. Cities will continue to be some of our best and loyal allies.

On the state side, I worked for the states for more than 20 years. And I cannot tell you how much I am grateful for the work that we have done with the states and many of the folks here have been doing with them. We just saw a report from Georgetown – Where are you? You're here somewhere – from Georgetown, the Climate Center there. Vicki, you are here, right? Oh, she must have run out.

But that basically said that 19 states are continuing to make significant progress consistent with the Clean Power Plan. Either working on plans or working on renewable fuel standards, or energy efficiency standards. There's a reason why that is. And that's because this is all about the energy transition that's already happening. When you want to buy renewables, they're cheaper than they've ever been before. The technology is more efficient than it's ever been before. People want it. They are demanding it. And energy efficiency saves money, as well as provides opportunities to keep people's bills and costs of energy down.

So while I appreciate their big lift for continuing to do this, I know darn right well that people are continuing to demand it. So whether or not states want to go under the heading that they're taking climate action, or simply doing what's best for their consumers, their energy systems, I'm fine with that. And that's going to continue, because the clean energy economy folks, that train has left the station.

MR. BURR: Let's go to the corporate side on this. Millennials, the generation that every company seems to want to capture right now, seems to demand sustainability and environmentally clean products. Companies are responding with corporate responsibility programs. How can the government take advantage of this generational moment?

MS. McCARTHY: Let me tell you how we have taken advantage of it. I think it's through a continued outreach. We're trying to make sure that EPA, because of its visibility as a premier science entity, when EPA puts its logo on something, it matters. That's why Energy Star products are right up front. People want to save money and they want to buy something that they can articulate as being maybe a little bit more money, if at all, but how quickly they can get paid back. That's what Energy Star is all about. They get front billing, folks, when you put in an appliance with an Energy Star label on it.

We're doing the same thing with household products. That's what Safer Choice is all about. And we continue to know and survey that folks want to see that label. They would rather buy it; they want to buy it. And what it does is it basically generates momentum among the chemical manufacturers themselves to produce products that are less toxic so they can get that label.

So there's ways in which we can continue to actually get information out.

You know, the third area really is, and it's work that I mentioned, is that there are so many ways in which individuals at the local level and Millennials themselves can actually get in the game here and really change their own world. We have apps and new monitoring technology that is so inexpensive, that can tell them what their little world looks like and how they may be able to work effectively in their own democracy, in their own city or community or neighborhood, to use information that we make readily transparent, that we analyze, that we help them with and make accessible.

That's where they can get active and work in ways that I work. I know you may not think I'm this old, but in the '60s and '70s – I look so young – that this is how we got involved. We didn't just protest; we did something. We took action and we became part of the solution. And I'm thinking that's what Millennials actually like, because they like to rule their own lives.

MR. BURR: Before I ask the final question, a quick reminder: The National Press Club is the world's leading professional organization for journalists, and we fight for a free press worldwide. For more information about the Club, please visit our website at press.org. I'd also like to remind you of some upcoming programs–

PROTESTER: [simultaneous conversation]

MR. BURR: Sir, we're in the middle of a program.

PROTESTER: No, you're not ignoring my question, because that's my neighbor's point and Juarez. Tens of thousands of people have non-disclosure agreements, Ms. McCarthy, with the United States. We begged you for a meeting. As the leader of the team that forced you to rewrite your 1000-page joke of a water study that ignored everything left [simultaneous conversation]

MR. BURR: Thank you sir.

PROTESTER: No, I'm not stopping. Listen to me. If the media's really here, where are you? That is my neighbor's water. He won a \$4.3 million settlement in federal court, a jury trial, this year. No meeting with Ms. McCarthy. Not only her, but her predecessor who refused to meet with us.

Ms. McCarthy, I'm asking, I'm begging you, President and Obama and you, please, meet with the impacted residents before you leave and tell Donald Trump he can come and see it, drink it and breathe it in our neighborhood. We will not tolerate it. We don't blame you. We don't blame the President. We blame the ignorance.

MR. BURR: Thank you, sir, you've made your point. Thank you very much, sir.

MS. McARTHUR: Well, this is a good example of how people continue to be passionate about having clean water and clean air. So it bodes well for the continued mission

of EPA and the work that we do. I wish we could be responsive and answer everybody's needs.

MR. BURR: Thank you, ma'am. I now present with the National Press Club mug.

MS. McCARTHY: Oh, cool, another one. [laughter]

MR. BURR: Another one.

MS. McCARTHY: Thank you. This is great. Thank you very much.

MR. BURR: You now have a set. I'm going to ask you one last question, we have one minute left. Please tell me what advice you would leave your successor.

MS. McCARTHY: My advice would be to listen to the great staff at EPA. They are experts in these issues. They will give you an opportunity to lead. I would suggest you take it.

MR. BURR: Thank you very much, Administrator. I would remind the audience please to remain in your seats until our guest has departed. Thank you, and we are adjourned. [sounds gavel]

MS. McCARTHY: Thanks very much.

[applause]

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