

**A Summary of EPN's All-Hands Meeting:
Developments of the 117th Congress
Friday, February 19, 2021**

Sebastian Irby gave an update on *Resetting the Course of EPA*. There have been over 7,200 downloads of *Reset* documents. EPN met with EPA and CEQ transition teams and was a resource to them when their access was still closed. We received a lot of positive feedback on the work and on EPN members; they are seen as a fountain of knowledge. We are encouraged by the quality of the appointments we've been seeing, including some of our own members. We're also encouraged by the rapid action seen from the White House, particularly with the many executive orders on the rules we've commented on, environmental justice, and other environmental issues. The Biden administration is facing a challenging issue of prioritizing seating EPA AAships, so many have been made acting assistant administrators. *Reset* was intended to make a lasting change, and we now have a chance to re-engage. We have already begun conversations with lead offices to hopefully establish that we are a resource that they can reach out to.

Sally Ericsson presented a deep-dive on the current state of the 117th Congress as it relates to the EPA. In the last three months, a lot of history was made—President Biden was elected, the Senate was flipped, and we had an insurrection at the Capitol and a second presidential impeachment. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell has blamed the January 6 insurrection squarely on former President Trump. We keep thinking things are going to go back to normal, but no one can predict how this Congress will work because the plates have shifted.

There is a huge legislative agenda and a lot of movement on spending bills: “building back better” with infrastructure, disaster bills with the polar vortex, and climate change. Leader Schumer and Speaker Pelosi are very experienced but have very slim majorities and must deal with a fractured Republican party. Post-insurrection, there is also a deep mistrust, with many Democrats questioning the intent of Republicans that voted against certification of the presidential election. While there is usually a window before the next round of elections comes into play, for Republicans, the 2022 and 2024 elections have already started. Members are looking over their shoulder because former President Trump still has a lot of influence.

On a positive note, the Hill and agencies will be able to talk more with each other on budgets, programs, and reorganizations. A lot of incoming Biden folks are former Hill staff and know how to communicate with the Hill. Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader Schumer understand the importance of EPA. They also know they have to deliver legislation and oversight to maintain their majority. It is still unclear what Minority Leader McConnell will do; President Biden's staff are wary as they remember how he slow-walked so much of President Obama's agenda. They will not wait for bipartisan talks on legislation.

Below is a summary of the more note-worthy House and Senate Committee appointments:

Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE), head of the Environment and Public Works Committee (EPW), is very close to President Biden. Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) is EPW's ranking member. She is pretty good on environmental issues that impact West Virginia; however, she voted against Michael Regan's nomination and will likely vote against things on climate. There are three new Democrats on the EPW Committee—Debbie Stabenow (MI), Alex Padilla (CA), Matt Kelly (AZ)—and three Democrats cycled off, which is fine because that means that others off the committee have knowledge. Republicans are pretty much the same except for the addition of Lindsey Graham (SC).

Rep. Frank Pallone (D-NJ) is still chair of the House Energy & Commerce Committee. Energy & Commerce has a huge remit, including broadband and energy. It will play a big role in developing infrastructure and climate bills. The new ranking member is Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA) from Spokane. Rodgers was a member of House Republican leadership. Rep. Paul Tonko (D-NY) is still chair of the Environment and Climate Change Subcommittee. The Oversight Subcommittee of Energy & Commerce is being chaired by Rep. Diane DeGette (D-CO) and still has Rep. Morgan Griffith (R-VA) as its

ranking member.

The House and Senate Oversight Committees will look hard at what happened with Trump and make sure that it doesn't happen again. In the House, Rep. Ro Khanna (D-CA) is chair of Oversight's Environment Subcommittee. Rep. Ralph Norman (R-SC) is the ranking member. Norman has a 2% League of Conservation Voters rating.

The House Science Committee is chaired by Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX). We have members who work with this House committee regularly. Speaker Pelosi reupped the Select Committee on Climate Crisis, chaired by Rep. Kathy Castor (D-FL). Ranking member Garret Graves (R-LA) knows a lot about climate resilience but is really conservative. Republican members are mostly from oil and gas states, but the committee takes an all-of-government approach.

Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR) remains as chair of the House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure, which has jurisdiction over many things including EPA, Superfund, and water resources. The ranking member is Rep. Sam Graves (R-MO). This committee created a bipartisan water resources development bill with EPW. It will be on them to organize a bipartisan bill that addresses infrastructure. They held a hearing on "Build Back Better" on Feb 23.

The Senate Budget Committee is chaired by Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT). They have hired an experienced budget hand to help the important budget reconciliation process. The House Budget Committee is chaired by Rep. John Yarmuth (D-KY) with Rep. Jason Smith (R-MO) as its new ranking member. The Democratic members are all-stars.

A lot of change has happened to the Appropriations Committees. In the House, Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) is the new chair. The Interior Subcommittee is chaired by Rep. Chellie Pingree (D-ME), and Rep. David Joyce (R-OH) is its ranking member. In the Senate, Sen. Pat Leahy (D-VT) is the Appropriations chair; Sen. Richard Shelby (R-AL) is ranking member. Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR) has taken over as chair of the Interior Subcommittee, and Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), who has been good on EPA, is the ranking member.

The Infrastructure bill will address the continuing concern with Flint and the knowledge that urban water systems are in bad shape. This feeds into the environmental justice agenda in the White House. With respect to the current Texas situation and energy resiliency, there will be questions of whether Texas can continue to remain off the nationwide grid. There is a lot of push to modernize the grid to deal with renewable energy. The polar vortex will push people to harden up their energy systems. Infrastructure bills will have a lot of green infrastructure. Currently, it is moving quicker than the Climate bill.

Because the Office of Management and Budget wasn't allowed to talk to the Biden transition team, they are about eight weeks behind, but we will be expecting a "skinny" budget in mid-March. The expectation is that they will try to get everything done in a regular order, but the disaster bill will likely be huge because many midwest states were impacted. We'll start to see hearings in the late spring.

Environmental justice programs will be addressed from the beginning rather than as an add-on. Across the board, people will be thinking about these programs right off the bat and working on how best to measure their benefits. There will be much more on-the-ground programmatic rather than high-level orders. The Cabinet knows it has to happen.

This is a huge agenda for the Biden administration and for Congress and they need to work together to get it done. It will be an eventful year. The challenge for EPN will be to figure out how best to help both.

Sally Ericsson is an EPN Board member and former Associate Director of Natural Resources, Energy, and Science at the Office of Management and Budget during the Obama administration; Associate Director for Natural Resources at the White House Council on Environmental Quality; and a senior official at the Commerce Department during the Clinton administration. She has worked as a senior policy official in the labor movement, at climate nonprofits, and on Capitol Hill.