

OPENING STATEMENT

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOSEPH LIEBERMAN
AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY
HEARING ON S. 159, EPA CABINET STATUS
JULY 24, 2001

Good morning. Today the Committee will be considering testimony on S. 159, a bill introduced by our distinguished colleague from California, Senator Boxer, which would raise the Environmental Protection Agency to cabinet rank. The bill is principally cosponsored by Senator Collins, who is serving as the Ranking Member for this hearing.

Since I have been a member of this Committee has twice held hearings – in 1990 and again in 1993 -- on raising the EPA to the cabinet level. I was an enthusiastic supporter of the legislation and was disappointed when we failed to enact it. Eight years later, I continue to believe strongly that EPA should be made a cabinet department. The time is ripe for our nation to say that we hold protection of the environment on par with the state of our armed forces and the quality of our educational system. A department of the environment is justified for a number of reasons.

First, giving the environment a permanent place in the cabinet is consistent with our national values. Since 1970, when Earth Day was first established and the EPA was created, the American people's awareness of environmental issues has clearly increased. Most of us have thankfully abandoned assumptions that the environment will take care of itself. More than ever, we appreciate the need to develop policies that allow us to use our resources in a sustainable, responsible fashion. Americans recognize that monitoring the health of the environment -- and intervening when it is threatened -- is an obligation we owe not only to ourselves but to future generations. Conferring cabinet status on EPA furthers our desire to preserve the priceless legacy of clean air and clean water for our children and grandchildren.

Second, enhancing EPA's status is necessary to ensure that environmental concerns are not overlooked by other departments as they independently pursue their own goals and missions. For example, California's recent power crisis has forced the nation to confront difficult issues, not only in

addressing our energy needs, but also in ensuring that our responses do not come at the expense of our environmental heritage. We need an EPA that has equal standing with the Department of Energy in developing a balanced policy on this critical issue. At other times, EPA may need to work with the Department of Defense over toxic waste sites on military bases or negotiate with the Department of Agriculture about the use of chemicals on farms. Cabinet status can help level the playing field between the EPA and these powerful agencies.

Finally, granting cabinet rank to EPA would make its leader more effective in dealing with the environment on the world stage. Problems associated with the quality of our air, land, and water do not stop at the border -- there is a global dimension to our most serious environmental concerns.

Symbolism does matter in this case. Of 198 nations, only ten, including the United States, do not maintain a cabinet department or ministry devoted to the environment. That puts us into the company of states like Libya, Uzbekistan, and Myanmar.

I'd like to thank Senators Boxer and Collins, and Congressman Boehlert. S. 159 is a bare-bones bill whose very simplicity is an advantage, unencumbered as it is with provisions that could make it more difficult to enact. And, philosophically, S. 159 is consistent with the best impulses of the American people.

[Committee Members](#) | [Subcommittees](#) | [Hearings](#) | [Key Legislation](#) | [Jurisdiction](#)
[Press Statements](#) | [Current Issues](#) | [1997 Special Investigation](#) | [Video of Select Hearings](#) | [Sites of Interest](#)