

## TESTIMONY



**Remarks for Governor Christine Todd Whitman,  
Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection  
Agency,  
before the  
Committee on Governmental Affairs  
U.S. Senate  
July 24, 2001**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for inviting me to appear before you on this topic of obvious importance to the environment. I am pleased to be here to support legislation that will establish a Department of Environmental Protection.

When the Environmental Protection Agency was created in 1970 by Richard Nixon, it was a combination of 10 different units from five departments and agencies. In a message to the Congress, President Nixon submitted his reasoning for the reorganization plan that would establish the EPA. He wrote, "As concern with the condition of our physical environment has intensified...it has become increasingly clear that only by reorganizing our Federal efforts can we...effectively ensure the protection, development, and enhancement of the total environment."

This statement rings true more than thirty years later. The environment continues to gain prominence in the American consciousness and is routinely ranked among the public's most important national concerns. Without an organic statute of it's own, there continues to be a need for an institutional framework to protect the environment that is equal in scope and significance to the pervasive nature of this issue.

Establishing EPA as a cabinet department is not a new idea. The first bill to elevate EPA to cabinet status was introduced in the Senate in June 1988; and since that time a dozen similar proposals have followed.

Former President Bush was the first president to support elevating the EPA to cabinet level, mentioning it in his State of the Union address more than a decade ago and inviting then-Administrator Reilly to attend cabinet meetings. President Clinton and President George W. Bush have followed suit with both presidential support for the legislation and a seat at cabinet meetings for the sitting EPA Administrator. Without legislation that codifies these practices, however, there is no guarantee that future Administrations will do the same.

The mission of the EPA is of vital importance to all of our lives. The actions of this agency protect our environment and public health by ensuring the most basic of life's necessities – clean air to breathe and safe water to drink.

In the short history of the Agency, our work has helped transform the way America views the environment – planting in the American consciousness a clear sense of environmental stewardship. The EPA has helped underscore the universal agreement that our natural resources are valuable, not just for economic prosperity but for sustained quality of life. No longer do we debate whether we need to act to protect the environment. Rather we discuss how we can keep America green while keeping our economy growing.

The EPA is a natural fit among the other cabinet departments. Our mission – to protect human health and safeguard the environment – both complements and contributes to the overall service of the cabinet. Already I have found my participation at the cabinet level helpful in navigating the many important areas of overlap between the work of EPA and other departments including Energy, Agriculture, Interior, Housing, and Labor. Quite frankly, I cannot think of a cabinet department with whom EPA does not interact. I would consider it vital to the work of future Administrators – and vital to our country – to assure similar cooperation and participation in the future.

The time has come to establish EPA as a full member of the cabinet, and doing so would be consistent with observations of state governments as well as our international counterparts.

As Governor of New Jersey, I felt it important to have my Environmental Commissioner as part of my cabinet. I find it instructive that all but five of the states that have a formal

cabinet include the head of the environmental agency at that level. As President Bush calls for increased cooperation between federal environmental regulators and state and local governments, it is appropriate to follow their leadership on this issue.

Further, the environment continues to play a central role in international relations. This legislation would bring the United States on par with the rest of the G-8 countries and more than sixty others by establishing a Secretary of the Environment.

I am pleased that Congress supports this important step. Both the Boxer/Collins bill, S. 159, and the Boehlert/Borski bill, H.R. 2438, would elevate EPA to cabinet status and both provide for the orderly transfer of responsibilities from the Agency to the Department. Moreover, both bills are "clean bills," in that they exclude extraneous policy issues that in the past have derailed the legislative process to establish a Department of the Environment.

While the Boxer/Collins bill is more prescriptive, I believe that the Boehlert/Borski bill provides the Agency with the flexibility it needs to ensure that the transition to Cabinet status goes as smoothly and efficiently as possible.

The justification for placing EPA in the cabinet is compelling. Creating a Department of the Environment will ensure that our country prioritizes this issue today and long into the future. As I have said repeatedly, my aim for this agency is to leave America's air cleaner, water purer, and land better protected than when I arrived. I enjoy the full support of the President in pursuit of this goal. Elevating the EPA to cabinet level will assure that future Administrators are able to set – and achieve – similar goals in the future.

Taking this step will be a reflection of the importance the Congress and the President place on the environment in America today. Thank you for allowing me to appear before you today, and I would be happy, now, to take any questions you might have.

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