



Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works *Questions for the Record for Jason Isaac*

"A Legislative Hearing to Examine S. 1345, the Comprehensive National Mercury Monitoring Act; S. 2476, the Environmental Justice Air Quality Monitoring Act of 2021; and S. ____, the Public Health Air Quality Act."

Chairman Carper:

1. During an exchange with Senator Sullivan during the hearing, you stated the following: "I am glad you brought up CO₂, because I am ingesting higher concentrations than what is prevalent in the atmosphere, and I am not spontaneously combusting, so we can't demonize CO₂. It is necessary for life on Earth." Does this mean you reject the evidence that carbon dioxide pollution is causing the earth to warm, that human activity is responsible for that warming, and that with increased warming comes an increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather like flooding and heat? If not, what did you mean by your statement?

Although I accept the evidence that both naturally occurring and anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) are causing the earth to warm, I reject the premise that carbon dioxide (CO₂) is "pollution" in that it is essential for life on earth. We should not conflate GHGs with pollution that is directly harmful to human health or demonize CO₂ as "toxic," which intentionally misleads the public.

The last 100 years show us that warming from GHGs will continue to be mild and manageable for centuries to come. Over the last 100 years, we have seen deaths from extreme weather-related events [drop 98%](#), all while our global population has quadrupled. During the same 100 years, the number of people living in extreme poverty has decreased 90%. Access to affordable reliable dense energy has made those advancements possible. Furthermore, even if EVERY signatory fulfilled its emission reductions targets under the Paris Accord—which appears less and less likely—global temperatures would decrease by [just 0.17°C](#) by 2100. Similarly, if the United States' CO₂ emissions were completely eliminated by 2030, temperatures would be [less than two tenths](#) of a degree lower—just 0.14°C—according to [climate data models](#) used by the United Nations and most global climate organizations.

2. On April 17, 2012, Dr. Jerome Paulson, Chair, Council on Environmental Health, American Academy of Pediatrics, testified before the EPW Committee, stating, "Methylmercury causes localized death of nerve cells and destruction of other cells in the developing brain of an infant or fetus. It interferes with the movement of brain cells and the eventual organization of the brain... The damage it [methylmercury] causes to an individual's health and development is permanent and irreversible. ... There is no evidence demonstrating a 'safe' level of mercury exposure, or a blood mercury concentration below which adverse effects on cognition are not seen. Minimizing mercury exposure is essential to optimal child health." It is my understanding the American Academy of Pediatrics has not changed its position.

* https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/4/3/4324fd62-dc89-4820-bd93-ff3714fcbe30/01AFD79733D77F24A71FEF9DAFCCB056.41712hearingwitness testimonypaulson.pdf

- a. Do you agree with the American Academy of Pediatrics' finding on the importance of minimizing mercury exposures for child health? If not, please cite the scientific studies that support your position .
- b. Do you agree that the record supports EPA's findings that mercury, non-mercury hazardous air pollutant metals, and acid gas hazardous air pollutants emitted from uncontrolled power plants pose public health hazards? If not, why not?
- c. Do you agree that there are places in this country where Americans are exposed to unhealthy levels of air toxic pollution, such as benzene and ethylene oxide? If not, why not?
- d. Do you agree that it is currently difficult, and sometimes impossible, to monetize the reduced risk of human health and ecological benefits from reducing mercury and other air toxic emissions? If not, why not?

Yes, it is difficult to monetize these benefits in large part because they are difficult to measure. At current pollution levels, simply measuring the effect of changes in air toxic emissions on levels in the ambient environment is a difficult task. Then trying to discern the long-term health effects of pollution, intertwined with other causes of those health effects, is an even taller task. We should not be regulating emissions at levels where it is almost impossible to accurately measure their effects, especially when those regulations have enormous impact on our economy, raising the costs of goods and services for the poorest among us and sending good jobs overseas.

- e. Do you agree that communities should have access to air quality and other environmental monitoring system data to keep informed on possible air toxic exposures? If not, why not?

To the extent that the benefits of such information outweigh the costs, then yes, that information can be useful. However, such information is likely not very useful for the communities themselves as it is for activist groups that are seeking to penalize industrial activity in any way possible, without concern for the benefits of that activity. Given the abusive litigation tactics of such groups, we are very concerned that this data would be used for that purpose.

3. The Texas Public Policy Foundation, which is your current employer, has a long history of opposing the Renewable Fuel Standard and other policies that support investments in biofuels as part of a clean energy solution. Your employer also has a history of opposing greenhouse gas emission standards for vehicles.

Do you support the Renewable Fuel Standard and do you support policies that further promote investments in biofuels as part of reducing consumer costs and U.S. emissions? If not, why not?

No, because biofuels are a low energy density, high land-use, low-efficiency fuel source. They are in every way inferior to fossil fuels on any measure of affordability, reliability, and environmental impact.

- a. Do you agree the transportation sector is the largest source of carbon and nitrogen oxide pollution in this country? If not, why not?

Yes. However, we disagree with the notion that existing levels of carbon and nitrogen oxide pollution from the transportation sector are harming the public health. We have reduced pollution levels from vehicles by well over 90% over the past 50 years, and the cost of trying to cut emissions would far outweigh any benefits.

- b. Do you agree that EPA's recent greenhouse gas standards for light-duty vehicles will save consumers in the long run in terms of energy savings? If not, why not?

The GHG standards will force consumers to use more fuel-efficient vehicles, which will save consumers' energy. However, that will come at the cost of more expensive vehicles, which harms those who most depend on low-cost transportation. It will come at the cost of reduced safety by forcing people to drive smaller vehicles as is documented in the EPA's regulatory impact statement, which widely overstates the monetized climate and health benefits. Also, the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 gives a \$7,500 tax credit for electric vehicles (EV), but not all EVs apply and other subsidies hide the real cost for the car. Most Americans cannot afford EVs.

- c. Do you agree that upgrading our air quality monitoring systems may help us to better track the air pollution being emitted from the transportation sector? If not, why not?

More air quality monitoring systems will improve tracking of air pollution. However, we believe existing monitoring is adequate to serve the needs of the public and adding more monitors is not worth the cost. Most of the monitoring being suggested by the proposed bills is designed to target important industrial activities and attempt to penalize them for emissions that, in the vast majority of cases, are not actually the cause of public health problems in nearby communities. Therefore, these extra monitors will likely not provide any benefit for public health.

4. In an April 2022 article, you wrote, “Levels of the criteria air pollutants tracked by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are now so low they’re nearly indistinguishable from natural levels.”** Yet, there are areas in this country that are in nonattainment for many criteria pollutants. Do you agree that there are places in this country where Americans are exposed to unhealthy levels of fine particulate matter pollution? If so, please explain. If not, please explain and include in your answer your views on the health impacts of fine particulate matter pollution.

- a. Do you agree that there are places in this country where Americans are exposed to unhealthy levels of ozone pollution? If so, please explain. If not, please explain and include in your answer your views on the health impacts of ozone pollution.

No. According to the [EPA’s green book](#), there is only one area of the country, the Los Angeles Basin, that currently has ozone levels exceeding 100 ppb. While it is impossible to rule out small health effects of 100 ppb ozone levels on sensitive groups, this level is not harmful for the vast majority of the population and certainly not more harmful than the economic cost of complying with the national standards. Our view is that the current national ozone standard of 70 ppb is scientifically unjustified and should be raised.

Furthermore, most of California suffers from high ozone not due to its own emissions but due to its geography, natural factors, and emissions transported from Asia. California researchers have documented these effects and have found that attempts to reduce the state’s ozone emissions will be mostly futile at reducing ambient ozone levels in the state.

- b. Do you agree that there are places in this country where Americans are exposed to unhealthy levels of air lead pollution? If so, please explain. If not, please explain.

No. [Ambient lead concentrations](#) at the existing 92 monitoring sites throughout the U.S. are at 0.03 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ on average, with only [two small towns](#) that barely miss the national standard of 0.15 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. This standard is more than adequate to protect human health, so we believe it is unlikely any Americans are being exposed to unhealthy levels of airborne lead on a routine basis. The vast majority of unhealthy lead exposures occur through our water system. Resources to prevent lead exposure should be focused in that area and not wasted on the miniscule problem of airborne lead pollution.

- c. Do you agree that there are places in this country where Americans are exposed to unhealthy levels of sulfur dioxide pollution? If so, please explain. If not, please explain.

No. Nationally, [sulfur dioxide \(SO₂\) levels](#) have declined 94% since 1980, and only a [few areas of the country](#) do not meet the current standard of 75 ppb. In general, the connections between SO₂ and harm to human health are tied to the role of SO₂ in the formation of particulate matter. However, [as we have documented](#), the link between particulate matter exposure at the levels currently observed in the U.S. and harm to human health is scientifically very weak. We believe the current standard has more than an adequate margin of safety and exposure to unhealthy levels of SO₂ is extremely rare.

5. Are you familiar with the CO₂ Coalition, which is an organization that promotes misinformation about climate science? If yes, do you support the organization and do you work with this organization in any way?

Yes, I am familiar with the CO₂ Coalition, which is a group of 45 scientists committed to the dissemination of accurate climate change science. In November 2019, the Texas Public Policy Foundation (TPPF) partnered with the CO₂ Coalition to [submit public comments](#) to the Environmental Protection Agency regarding proposed revisions to federal

** <https://www.texaspolicy.com/for-a-cleaner-earth-invest-in-dont-divest-from-fossil-fuels/>

methane regulations. Neither TPPF nor I financially support the CO₂ Coalition, but we encourage this organization's efforts to share the science, not the politics, regarding climate change and CO₂.

6. Please describe one or two areas of agreement you took away from the hearing. Where did we find common ground on the state and needs of our nation's air quality monitoring system?

One area where we have common ground is that we agree on the substantial improvements the United States has made in improving air quality over the last 5 decades; we have reduced the 6 criteria pollutants [78%](#) over the last 50 years. Utilizing existing air quality monitors showed that during the first two months of the COVID lockdowns, with 40-50% fewer vehicles on the road, that air quality in the U.S. [was not significantly impacted](#). Our air in the U.S. is near a natural state.

Ranking Member Capito:

1. Given your personal experience in implementing air programs at the state level, do you believe it is helpful for Congress to recommend a one-size-fits-all program for air monitoring funding? Or are these decisions better left up to state and local air agencies?

A great example of the success of a state implementation plan was the effort to bring the Houston-Galveston area into compliance with the 2008 ozone standard. This is one of the most heavily industrialized areas of the country, in a region that is geographically prone to ozone formation. Yet the region has been steadily reducing its ozone levels and should come into compliance with the standard in the near future. However, since the Obama administration EPA lowered the standard again from 75 ppb to 70 ppb in 2015, the region will still be in nonattainment for some time to come. In contrast, federal implementation plans have a history of being punitive to many states and having no connection to real cost-benefit analysis. For example, the [EPA's transport rule for the 2015 ozone standard](#) will likely result in the closure of more than half of Texas' coal fleet, all in an effort to attain a 1 ppb reduction of ozone in Wisconsin.

Senator Inhofe:

1. Under the Biden Administration, gas prices have risen to record levels due in large part to Biden's policies that have restricted fossil energy development. Can you elaborate on why domestic energy production is essential to both our energy and national security?
 - a. What could the Biden Administration do today that would support America's energy security?

As a matter of national policy, investment in fossil energy keeps our electricity affordable, and it encourages more LNG exports to trading partners and allies, which is a win for national security. The Biden administration should stop encouraging energy discrimination, because denying capital or investments to American energy companies [will not eliminate our need](#) for fossil fuels, it will just transfer energy purchases to overseas producers. Instead, the Biden administration should champion affordable and reliable energy for all Americans. We should return to energy dominance, which will relieve Americans and our allies abroad who have been so heavily dependent on Russia.

