



Committee: Senate Environment & Public Works Committee (EPW)
Event: [Hearing to Examine the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's \(EPA\) Proposed Fiscal Year 2027 \(FY27\) Budget](#)
Date: April 29, 2026

Executive Summary: On April 29, 2026, EPW held a hearing to review the FY27 budget request for the EPA. EPA Administrator **Lee Zeldin** provided testimony.

- Republican members were generally complimentary of EPA's recent efforts to reduce regulations and prioritize baseload energy production, citing these as cost-lowering measures.
- Democrats were generally critical of the EPA under Zeldin's leadership, arguing that the agency was prioritizing special interests at the expense of public health and environmental protections.
- The most prominent area of bipartisan consensus was over the defense of the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds (SRFs). Relatedly, lawmakers on both sides of the aisle in addition to Administrator Zeldin voiced a desire for a congressional solution to exempt passive receivers from PFAS cleanup liabilities.

Member Toplines:

[Chair Shelley Moore Capito \(R-WV\)](#): Capito applauded EPA's adherence to its "statutory role" and offering of relief to industries, particularly in the power sectors. Specifically, Capito mentioned support for the repeal of the Clean Power Plan 2.0, the rescission of the Endangerment Finding, and the clawback of *Inflation Reduction Act* (IRA) funding. While Capito's statement was generally positive, she also made her support known for "adequate" funding levels for SRFs, alluding to displeasure over the agency's proposal to cut funding.

Ranking Member Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI):¹ Whitehouse accused Zeldin of promoting fossil fuel interests at the expense of American consumers, centering his statement on the economic costs of climate change. He also generally criticized the Trump administration's approach to energy, arguing renewable energy options like offshore wind would counter rising energy costs and offer cleaner alternatives to the fossil fuel sources being championed.

Witness Topline:

[Lee Zeldin, Administrator, EPA](#): Zeldin argued that the agency has been re-rooted in "reality" as opposed to "left-wing fantasy." He outlined a number of highlights under his leadership, including the repeal of the Endangerment Finding and other deregulatory actions, arguing that they will ultimately save Americans taxpayers while also restoring energy dominance.

¹ An opening statement for Ranking Member Whitehouse was not available at the time of this memo's distribution.

Major Takeaways:

Energy Reliability & Affordability:

- Sens. **Kevin Cramer** (R-ND) and **Pete Ricketts** (R-NE) both challenged Ranking Member Whitehouse's claims about renewable energy with Cramer arguing that his affordability claims ignore both taxpayer subsidies and the high cost of backup power for intermittent renewables. Zeldin agreed.
- Later, Whitehouse engaged in a heated exchange with Zeldin, accusing the EPA of raising consumer costs (via insurance, gas, and health impacts) to benefit fossil fuel "donors."
 - Zeldin pushed back, defending the necessity of coal plants for grid reliability and job protection.
 - Chair Capito also pushed back on Whitehouse's energy criticism, asking Zeldin to discuss the agency's efforts to repeal Biden administration power rules and describe how efforts will "lead to more affordable, reliable electricity while continuing to protect public health and welfare."
- Sen. **Jon Husted** (R-OH) spoke about the promises of nuclear energy as an affordable and reliable energy solution with low carbon outputs. He asked Zeldin about the importance of permitting reform to help bring on nuclear energy as a replacement to other "baseload operations."
 - Zeldin emphasized the importance of permitting reform, touting the agency's recent approval of a small modular reactor in Tennessee in just eight days, noting it would have taken the previous administration three years to complete the same approval.

Water SRFs and PFAS Issues:

- Chair Capito asked about passive receiver liability under the *Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation & Liability Act* in the context of PFAS cleanup.
 - Zeldin agreed that the issue was important, reiterating his position that "polluter[s] should pay" and ratepayers should not be responsible for addressing PFAS contaminated water supply. He urged continued work by Congress to address this issue, citing a limit on EPA's current authorities and settlement tools.
- Capito also reiterated her assertion that SRFs are critical, especially for small and rural communities; she asked Zeldin to commit to working with states to implement all funding that Congress provides from the SRFs in future authorizations and appropriations.
 - Sen. **Lisa Blunt Rochester** (D-DE) also voiced concerns with the agency's proposed SRF cuts, asking for Zeldin to commit to working with her office to support such funds. Zeldin agreed, but noted that congressionally directed spending has impacted the revolving nature of these funds.
- Sen. **Dan Sullivan** (R-AK) also discussed the importance of maintaining funding for rural water and sewer infrastructure.

Vehicle Standards:

- Sen. **Ed Markey** (D-MA) criticized the EPA's rollback of vehicle greenhouse gas standards, arguing it raises gas prices and ignores health costs. He accused the EPA of assigning "zero value" to American lives in its cost-benefit analyses for pollution rollbacks.
 - Zeldin disputed Markey's economic models and defended the rollbacks.
- Sen. Sullivan spoke specifically of Obama administration rules requiring Diesel Exhaust Fluid Sensors on vehicles, thanking the administration for [new guidance](#) repealing the requirement, characterizing the rule as having been overly burdensome for Alaskans living in cold weather.

Grant Cancellations:

- Sen. **Bernie Sanders** (I-VT) criticized EPA's rescission of the \$7 billion in funding for the Solar for All program, arguing it deprives low-income Americans of lower electric rates.
 - Zeldin countered that Congress rescinded the program via the One Big Beautiful Bill Act and criticized the program's original structure. Sen. Sanders argued that Zeldin's claims about the program were inaccurate.
- Sen. **Adam Schiff** (D-CA) also pressed Zeldin on a court ruling that found the EPA failed to conduct an "individualized review" of canceled IRA grants. Zeldin stood by his previous testimony that individual reviews were conducted and committed to providing documentation to the Committee.