Senate Committee Holds Hearing on Nomination of Andrew Wheeler as EPA Administrator

Thursday, January 17, 2019

On January 16, 2019, the Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee held a hearing on the nomination of Andrew Wheeler to serve as Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Mr. Wheeler currently serves as the Acting Administrator, having taken the reins of EPA after former Administrator Scott Pruitt resigned in July 2018. An archived webcast of the hearing is available online. In introducing Mr. Wheeler, Senator John Barrasso (R-WY), Chair of the EPW Committee, stated: “under Acting Administrator Wheeler’s leadership, the agency has taken a number of significant actions to protect our nation’s environment, while also supporting economic growth. Acting Administrator Wheeler has led efforts to: issue common-sense regulatory proposals, like the Affordable Clean Energy Rule, and the revised definition of ‘Waters of the United States’; implement this Committee’s 2016 bipartisan reform of the Toxic Substances Control Act [(TSCA)] in an effective and efficient manner; reduce lead exposure, including through the Federal Lead Action Plan; provide greater regulatory certainty to states, to Tribes, localities, and to the regulated community; and improve enforcement and compliance assistance. Acting Administrator Wheeler is very well qualified to run the [EPA].” Republicans on the EPW Committee were supportive of his nomination and actions while serving as the EPA Acting Administrator. They noted with praise his deregulatory efforts, the repeal and replacement of the Obama-era Clean Power Plan, the proposed replacement of the Waters of the United States rule and the proposed repeal of the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards.

Democrats on the EPW Committee, however, expressed their disapproval of Mr. Wheeler, as he faced sharp questions from them. EPW Ranking Member Tom Carper (D-DE) expressed his concern that Mr. Wheeler failed “to moderate some of Scott Pruitt’s most environmentally destructive policies,” adding that “upon examination, Mr. Wheeler’s environmental policies appear to be almost as extreme as his predecessor’s.” When questioned on his views on climate change by Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Mr. Wheeler admitted that he believed it was a “huge issue” that should be addressed internationally, but he stopped short of agreeing with it being “one of the greatest crises facing our planet.” Despite the seeming Democratic opposition to his nomination, Mr. Wheeler is expected to be approved by the EPW Committee and, eventually, the Senate, and likely soon.

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