

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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Opening Statement
Ranking Member Stacey Plaskett

Hearing Entitled "Examining Sue and Settle Agreements: Part II"

July 25, 2017

Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling today's hearing. The practice we are discussing today is really very unremarkable: enforcement actions by government agencies.

Congress passes the nation's federal laws, and federal agencies must implement them by issuing regulations, and enforcing them.

When those agencies fail to do that, they are in jeopardy of a court order requiring them to do so.

Congress has passed laws allowing citizens to sue federal agencies when they fail to enforce the laws that Congress has passed.

Because of citizen suits, Americans have had recourse when their right to vote has been threatened.

Because of citizen suits, Americans have had recourse when housing discrimination threatened their chance at attaining their piece of the American dream.

Because of citizen suits, doors have literally been opened to Americans with disabilities to create a more inclusive and accommodating society.

My Republican colleagues would like to diminish citizen's access to court to enforce federal statutes.

Today, their justification is that federal regulations and citizen suits to enforce them impose a burden on state governments. Instead, they would leave states alone to comply with federal law to the extent it is convenient for them.

I say, ask the people of Flint, Michigan if that makes sense to them?

Because if we have learned nothing else from the tragedy of water poisoning of Flint Michigan, it is that state governments should not be left to their own devices to enforce health and safety regulations.

The Governor's own Health Department director – a member of his inner circle and cabinet -- has been charged with felonies that contributed to the poisoning! So has the Governor's appointee who ran the City of Flint under an emergency management law. And the Governor has accepted responsibility for the tragedy.

But some states do need help to comply with federal rules, and the federal government should provide it. An infrastructure bill and funding that addresses the funding problems of state and local governments would be a step in the right direction. But curbing federal health and safety regulations is not.

Contrary to what my Republican colleagues might say, federal regulations have a positive impact the economy.

A 2016 study conducted by OMB looked at a range of regulations across the economy and found that their benefits far outweighed their costs.

OMB “found that a decade’s worth of major federal regulations had produced annual benefits to the U.S. economy of between \$269 billion and \$872 billion while imposing aggregate costs between \$74 billion to \$110 billion.”

In spite of these facts, Congressional Republicans aim to diminish the use of citizen suits. That is why, I believe, they have called today’s hearing

But what we should learn from today’s hearing is the incredible value to the public’s health, welfare and environment that federal regulations and citizen suits have had.

I look forward to a lively discussion on this topic today.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

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