

# Is shutting down the EPA unwise?

Recently I read an obscure news brief which really made me angry. It represents social engineering at its worst without benefiting the average U.S. citizen. It is also a waste of taxpayer money. I wrote a brief comment to send to my representatives in Washington, then posted on the internet and sent it to some friends. Here is the comment:

The EPA must be shut down. This recent (circa 10/29/11) action says it all: From Reuters, “The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency approved the use of Canadian crops such as canola and corn in U.S. biofuels on Thursday, a move that lifted Canadian canola prices and may help the U.S. meet its ambitious targets for biofuels. The EPA’s designation of Canadian crops as a renewable biomass will allow U.S. biofuel makers to collect tax credits for using them, said Canola Council of Canada president JoAnne Buth.”

This was done so that the U.S. could meet arbitrary and meaningless biofuel use goals set by the EPA itself, but consider the implications which could also be called “unintended consequences.”

1. It is a backdoor subsidy to Canadian producers.
2. It makes us less energy independent, not more.
3. It promotes an inferior fuel (ethanol) at the expense of using a similar amount of superior fuel (generally diesel and natural gas) in its production.
4. It increases U.S. federal spending.
5. It will raise food prices in Canada.
6. It negatively impacts our balance of trade.
7. It caters to special interests.
8. It shows that our domestic “green jobs” plan is an economic failure.

My comment apparently bothered one friend who wrote back with his objections to my position. Here are two quotations from his comments:

“Nixon created the EPA in the first place, to create a national set of regulations.”

“You truly believe the EPA should be shut down because you don’t like some things they do? Should every government agency be shut down because someone, somewhere disagrees with something that’s being done?”

In one regard, I was surprised by his comments since we have similar views in general. However, I shouldn't have been surprised since saying "the EPA must be shut down" makes me sound like an extremist. These days, only a TEA party activist or Libertarian would dare make a statement like that. Even large corporations like General Electric and Norfolk Southern have jumped on the politically correct green energy bandwagon hoping to get subsidies, mandates or other special considerations from the U.S. Government. My friend and I generally agreed with each other's points, so I had to look elsewhere to find out why I was quite comfortable saying "the EPA must be shut down," and he was uncomfortable hearing it. In short, he probably sees the EPA as the same organization that Nixon created and I don't.

Institutions often change much as the meanings of words change. Often we aren't aware of the change because it has been so gradual. How many today would realize the Gay (18)90s had nothing to do with same sex marriage? Who today would attempt to use the word "gay" in its original sense? It's gotten to the point where even a meaningless syllable can cause terror in the hearts of those who don't wish to offend. How often does the word niggardly come up in polite conversation any more? Why was the spelling of the product niger seed changed to nyjer seed? Why did we need to change the spelling of the Sushitna River in Alaska to Susitna? Even the meaning of the word "liberal" has changed so much that its use in a book written in 1944 requires a footnote today.

In my view, the EPA of today is far different from the EPA of 1970. As time has progressed they have gone from addressing valid environmental concerns to pushing issues with primarily political rather than environmental objectives.

One example of how far the EPA has moved from protecting people and the environment can be seen at their website where MBTE is still presented as a good gasoline oxygenate as of October, 2011 (e.g. <http://www.epa.gov/mtbe/gas.htm>). However, there were concerns about the use of MBTE at least as early as the 1980s. Eventually it was determined to be a serious ground water contaminant and was totally banned with effective dates ranging from 2002 to 2006, not by the EPA, but by the states in which it was being used. In this case the EPA was and still is neglectful about a clear environmental hazard.

Other pollution standards have been arbitrarily tightened up. This was the case when the EPA named carbon dioxide as a pollutant to discourage using traditional energy sources in order to promote a political green jobs agenda complete with crony capitalism. Their position that carbon dioxide is a climate damaging pollutant is based on what experts said over a decade ago. Careful review of the data the experts used and additional data collected since then no longer supports the cause and effect claimed by the EPA. In fact, the experts now say we may even be entering a prolonged cooling period. Those who still want to argue in favor of climate change caused by carbon dioxide are unable to justify the EPA's increasing promotion of fuel ethanol. The use of ethanol does not reduce the use of fossil fuels because a large amount of fossil fuels is used in its production. Thus fuel ethanol is not carbon neutral.

In effect, the EPA has become a powerful tool of coercive government with little actual interest in the environment. Like the massive behemoth that the Vietnam War eventually became, it must be shut down because reform is no longer possible. State environmental departments will continue to protect the environment and we can always create a new agency with carefully defined limits to set national standards. But no unelected agency should have the power to issue broad mandates without these being subject to a vote by our elected representatives in Congress. We can't afford such agencies if we want to save our democratic republic along with its rule of law and individual rights.

Eric A. Neubauer  
October 13, 2011