

# Frelinghuysen key to saving EPA, environmentalists say

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A town hall hosted by pro-environment groups drew a near capacity crowd to the Parsippany Library to discuss budget cuts to the EPA and related environmental programs proposed by President Trump.



(Photos: William Westhoven/Staff Photo)

**PARSIPPANY** - A coalition of environmental groups drew a large crowd to the Parsippany-Troy Hills Library Main Branch on Tuesday night to discuss cuts to the Environmental Protection Agency and other environmental agencies proposed by President Donald Trump. The meeting, attended by nearly 100 people, was one of five scheduled around the state this week, said Matt Smith of Food & Water Watch.



A town hall focused on proposed cuts to the EPA budget drew a large crowd to the main branch of the Parsippany Library. August 29, 2017 (Photo: William Westhoven/Staff Photo)

"We are here tonight because in March, President Trump had proposed unprecedented, massive cuts to social programs and environmental programs, including a 31 percent cut to the EPA," said Smith, one of several speakers representing state and national organizations promoting environmental stewardship.

Another meeting was scheduled for Wednesday in Somerville, followed by two more on Thursday in Willingboro and Shrewsbury.

Smith said the coalition wanted to meet in Parsippany because it's in the state's 11th Congressional District and represented by Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee.

The president's budget proposal for fiscal 2018, announced in May, included funding cuts for the EPA, the Department of the Interior and related programs by \$2.6 billion, or 31.4 percent, the largest cut for any Cabinet-level agency.

The House Appropriations Committee, however, voted in July to restore some of those cuts by proposing a \$31.4 billion funding bill for the EPA, the Interior Department and related programs.

"The power of the purse lies in Congress, not the White House," Frelinghuysen said during a telephone town hall in the spring.

The House will take up the budget when reconvenes after Labor Day, but environmentalists note the committee proposal still slashes the EPA budget by \$528 million, and \$824 million overall for the Interior Department, U.S. Forest Service and related agencies.

"While the spin from Congressman Frelinghuysen was that these cuts are far less than the originally proposed 31 percent, we knew all along that the original proposal was just to move the goal posts to set the stage for most likely smaller, but still equally devastating, cuts to environmental spending," Smith said.

Those cuts could hurt New Jersey more than most states, given that New Jersey still has 118 Superfund sites in need of remediation, including eight in Morris County, according to Jeff Tittel, executive director of the New Jersey Sierra Club.

The trickle-down effect of the cuts would impact state agencies and programs as well, Tittel said. "The only science (Trump) believes in is political science," Tittel said. "(The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection) has a \$300 million budget for operations. We could lose \$80 million. That will mean layoffs in DEP. That means people who write the rules to protect us, people who monitor air and water, who oversee toxic sites, they could be laid off because we don't have the money, especially with Christie there, the other fossil fool."

The key to New Jersey's, and the nation's environmental health could lie squarely in the hands of Frelinghuysen, Tittel said.

"He can actually become an impediment to Trump's cuts," Tittel said. "He could stand up. But the problem is, he also has gone along his whole career in trying to get things for himself, not for the people of his district."

Elliott Ruga, policy director for the Boonton-based Highlands Coalition, brought the conversation closer to home by focusing his remarks on the needs of the New Jersey Highlands Region, which covers about 16 percent of the state, but provides drinking water for 5.6 million people.

"We are going to have to become really active to help New Jersey, not only to get passed the damage that was done over the past eight years, but to get us through the next four years," Ruga said. "Gov. (Chris) Christie has decimated the DEP, halved its budget, there's very few staff left and almost no enforcement. What's coming down the pike, nationally, is going to be an incredible challenge for us."

"The time to resist is now," said Michael Aronson of the Environmental Defense Fund.. "The time to organize is now. There are countless, fantastic environmental organizations here. I encourage you to go up to each and every one of them, learn more about the issues you are passionate about and join."

Other speakers included Angela Delli Santi of the League of Conservation Voters, Ken Dolsky of the Morris County-based Coalition Against the Pilgrim Pipeline, Elizabeth Juviler of NJ 11th For Change, Jefferson Harman LaSala, a board member of the Pompton Lakes Residents for Environmental Integrity and Doug O'Malley of Environment New Jersey.

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