

EPA in the crosshairs

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Congressional Republicans planning an assault on the Obama administration's environmental record aim to turn [Lisa Jackson](#) into public enemy No. 1.

On the campaign trail, [Republicans](#) have adopted the Environmental Protection Agency as a favorite symbol of the White House's regulatory overreach. And behind the scenes in Washington, GOP staffers and K Street lobbyists who say they've been dissed by [the EPA](#) administrator are looking forward to getting some revenge.

Like other senior administration officials, Jackson can expect to be chained to a witness chair on Capitol Hill if Republicans win either chamber. There, they hope to make her defend policies the GOP contends are unpopular and anti-business.

"I think she'll be very much in demand on the Hill, at times not of her choosing," said a former staffer on the House Energy and Commerce Committee. "It will diminish her free time, shall we say."

With Democrats holding the reins in Congress, and White House energy and [climate adviser Carol Browner](#) taking many of the arrows from the GOP, Jackson has had enough of a political buffer zone to issue some of the strictest environmental rules in history. Republicans have decried the EPA at each step along the way but have been unable to do much about it.

Some of the animosity is personal: Republicans in both chambers and K Street attorneys say Jackson and her staff are too dismissive of opposing views and other stakeholders.

"When we write a letter to them, we'll get a form letter back," said a Republican aide. "We have seen no real indication that they hear or understand our concerns. She's loyal to the White House, and beyond that, they're just totally in sync with the view that we need a lot more regulations."

Rep. Joe Barton (R-Texas), ranking member of the energy committee, said Jackson isn't "rude or uncivil" but appears to be "on some sort of a mission, come heck or high water."

"Mrs. Jackson does not appear to be overly concerned about a cooperative relationship with the Congress or, at least, with the minority members of the Energy and Commerce Committee," Barton told POLITICO.

Rep. Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.) complained earlier this year after a contentious

meeting with Jackson over coal mining. Jackson told her that “the EPA is not required, and they do not consider, jobs or economic impact when evaluating permits,” Capito told the Charleston Daily Mail.

“We had a good give and take. It wasn't adversarial,” Capito said. “But there was no door opening where she said she might consider something. There was no door opening for me to say, 'Are you open to some change? Maybe you could come down to the coal fields.' I kept trying to, but there wasn't that possibility.”

The showdown on Capitol Hill could be reminiscent of 1995, when Republicans reclaimed both chambers of Congress in the middle of President Bill Clinton's first term.

“The impact on EPA was significant,” said a former agency official who worked under then-Administrator Browner. “There was more oversight, and it was more intense.”

Republicans will try to use hearings to discredit the administration and the EPA, that person said. “It can have its nastier side.”

Rep. Fred Upton (R-Mich.), the favorite to chair the Energy and Commerce Committee if Democrats lose the House, hopes to investigate the Obama administration's “poisonous regulations” and the role of policy “czars” in the White House, including energy adviser Browner.

“If we have the gavel, I can assure you that the oversight subcommittee will be very busy,” Upton told POLITICO, adding that Browner can also expect frequent invitations to testify. “We'll have a seat reserved for her,” he said.

Energy and Commerce won't be the only panel on Jackson's dance card: Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) said he wants to use the Oversight and Government Reform Committee to lead a probe into the science underpinning the EPA's climate regulations. And Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner (R-Wis.) hopes to keep the Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming alive so he can examine the administration's climate and energy policies.

Jackson, 48, is no shrinking violet. New Orleans raised, she earned her chops as an enforcer at both the EPA and New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection before becoming the state's top environmental official. She has declared she has no plans to leave her post anytime soon.

Under her watch, the EPA has pushed through the nation's first-ever climate rules aimed at curbing emissions from large industries and automobiles. The agency has also come under fire for its efforts to limit toxic coal ash, ozone and soot and smog emissions from power plants.

One industry attorney complained that Jackson sees everything as a “mythic struggle between right and wrong,” rather than looking to compromise.

"It's definitely anti-lobbyist rhetoric," Jackson told POLITICO earlier this month. "It's definitely meant to reflect the fact that when I go around the country, people want clean air. They are as passionate about clean air and clean water as [about] any of a number of issues; they want protection for their families and their children.

"I do very much believe that it's time for us to get past this tired dance, where folks inside this Beltway get paid a lot of money to say things that aren't true about public health initiatives that this agency is charged by law with undertaking," she added.

Democratic staffers, meanwhile, are quick to praise the agency. Eben Burnham-Snyder, a spokesman for House energy bill author Rep. Ed Markey (D-Mass.), said the EPA "has been very helpful, especially during the process of passing the energy bill through the committee," in providing reports and analyses.

EPA spokesman Brendan Gilfillan said Jackson's "commitment to openness compares particularly well to the lack of transparency during the previous administration.

"EPA is not always legally able to answer every question a member of Congress might ask," he added. "But we have responded – or are in the process of responding – to every letter sent to us, regardless of the merits of the arguments made in the letters themselves."

And Jackson's supporters say she won't relent under pressure. "She's up to whatever comes," said Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Campaign.

Becker warned that Republicans would pay a price for dragging officials to hearings to score political points. "Merely subpoenaing people and hauling them up to answer the same questions ... will get them nowhere," he said. "The American people don't want nothing to happen; they want the right things to happen."

But not every hearing will produce fireworks, suggested former Rep. Thomas Bliley Jr. (R-Va.), who led the renamed House Commerce Committee from 1995 to 2001.

Bliley said the White House could find creative ways to avoid some GOP attacks. When reluctant officials do appear, he said, "they come in and generally read a long statement; announce in advance that they have another meeting they have to attend, ... and so they won't be there very long."

