

Podcast Transcript
Barbara Bennett on EPA's Technology Innovation Roadmap
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Host Nathan Gentry:

This is an inside look at EPA's Roadmap, Technology Innovation for Environmental and Economic Progress. I'm Nathan Gentry. Today we're talking to EPA's Chief Financial Officer Barbara Bennett to find out what the roadmap means for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's work and what it means for the business community.

Barb, what is the Technology Innovation Roadmap?

Barbara Bennett:

So the Technology Innovation Roadmap is really a plan for EPA to promote technology innovation. Many environmental problems can be prevented or addressed through innovative technologies that reduce or minimize pollution and, at the same time, these technologies can grow the American economy. When EPA asks the private sector to work with us to solve environmental problems, we're also talking about new business opportunities. We're talking about entrepreneurs who discover innovative ways of reducing air or water pollution or reusing electronic waste. These technologies can be brought to the marketplace, creating jobs. It's a win for the environment and people's health and a win for the economy.

So the Roadmap helps EPA focus its efforts in three areas: research & development, engaging with the private sector, and taking a look at our own regulatory process. On the R&D side, we need to encourage scientific research in promising environmental technologies. We also need to talk more with the private sector in terms of access to capital for these new technologies, bringing them to scale in the marketplace. And from a regulatory standpoint, we need to take a look at our rules and ensure that sound environmental policy choices drive technological innovation which can provide a stronger environmental protection at lower economic costs. These three pieces are key to our work and how we can encourage technology innovation in support of sustainable environmental and human health protection.

Host Nathan Gentry:

So, as the Chief Financial Officer for EPA, what does this mean for your work?

Barbara Bennett:

So the Roadmap provides a framework for connecting and advancing a number of activities that we're currently doing to promote technology and innovation. One area that I'm focusing on is engaging the private sector. In May, we are sponsoring a Technology Market Summit with American University here in DC. The Summit will bring together about a 150 leaders from the public and private sectors to identify how we can accelerate the growth of environmental technology market. The group will include representatives from government, industry, academia, and the investment community. I am very excited about the Summit and see it as a first step to opening dialogues and connecting the players.

Host Nathan Gentry:

What topics will the Summit focus on?

Barbara Bennett:

We have a number of fantastic speakers lined up spanning government, private companies, and the nonprofit community. We are fortunate to have EPA's Administrator Lisa Jackson and other of her Cabinet colleagues opening up the Summit, including Secretary of Commerce John Bryson and the U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk. While the day is about technology, the morning will look at three specific case studies, and the afternoon will look more broadly at innovation and private sector investment opportunities.

So we'll be focusing on three areas as case studies for environmental technologies. The first area is on supply chain, with a particular case study to be on the clean and sustainable automotive supply chain. We'll talk about current technologies, challenges in the supply chain to advanced materials, the policy drivers of new technologies, and what market opportunities there may be. The second area will be on air monitoring, with a particular case study focusing discussion on real-time fence line air monitoring. We'll investigate the development and deployment of innovative air monitoring technology to promote better health and improve the bottom line. And the third case study will focus on energy opportunities from biodigesters and biogas. We'll explore technologies and strategies to overcome impediments to harnessing energy from waste resources.

Then in the afternoon we have lined up some leaders in the field to bring the environmental technology and the finance issues together in what I expect will be a stimulating and thought provoking exchange of ideas and opportunities. My goal is that the Summit is a first step in moving forward to address challenges and start applying solutions – to see results and actions.

Host Nathan Gentry:

That sounds like a great event. What other sorts of activities are you doing to implement the ideas in the roadmap?

Barbara Bennett:

Well during my time at EPA, I've been putting my corporate background to use by speaking to the investment community, big and small, about environmental technologies. We as an Agency need to improve the way we communicate with the private sector. In particular, we need to show businesses there are opportunities to earn market rate returns on environmental technologies and projects. I have gotten a tremendously positive response from the investment community so far.

What's great about the roadmap is that it expresses how EPA is thinking differently about environmental technology – connecting the important dots of research and development, the private sector, and our regulatory process – so that we can figure out better ways of doing business to protect the environment and human health.

Host Nathan Gentry:

How do you see the roadmap's vision changing over time?

Barbara Bennett:

Well the details of EPA's projects and priorities will change over time. But the overall importance of fostering and supporting technology innovation as an important component of sustainable environmental protection will remain. Government cannot and should not be the only driver. But what EPA can do is play a crucial role in catalyzing interest and understanding in markets for business opportunities in environmental technologies and environmental protection. And we can encourage small business entrepreneurs in their pursuit of environmentally beneficial technologies.

Host Nathan Gentry:

Thank you so much for talking with me today, Barb.

If you would like to learn more about EPA's Technology Innovation Roadmap, you can visit www.epa.gov/envirofinance/innovation.html, where you can read the Roadmap and learn about other activities EPA is doing to further this important work. Thanks for joining us.

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