First commissioned a century ago, the Toledo, Ohio, refinery has long supplied gasoline and other products that fuel the region's economy and communities.

But last month, local officials gave the Environmental Protection Agency the stark warning that those benefits could unravel due to a proposal to increase the amount of biofuel in the nation's fuel supply.

At EPA's July 31 hearing, Toledo officials underscored the real-world consequences that could be echoed by many other refinery and manufacturing communities across the nation of setting federal Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) biofuel requirements at levels higher than can be realistically achieved.

They discussed the vital products and contributions of the Toledo Refining Company, which directly employs 550 high-paying, skilled jobs; contributes $5.1 billion annually to the Toledo region's economy; and provides up to 20 percent of the fuel supply of Ohio and Southeast Michigan – including Detroit.

Brandon Sehlhorst, Toledo's commissioner of economic and business development, warned EPA that unreasonably high ethanol volumes, such as the ones the agency is proposing for 2020, could threaten refining jobs. Were unachievable biofuel mandates to result in refiners going bankrupt, as happened in Pennsylvania last year, it "would have a detrimental impact on the Toledo region, resulting in thousands of direct and indirect job losses, a decrease in tax base and a loss of a valued civic partner," Sehlhorst said.

Toledo Refining Company manager Scott Hayes at the hearing added that EPA's "overly aggressive" proposal is a de facto foreign biofuels mandate because it would require more biodiesel than domestic producers can economically ship to meet demand on U.S. coasts, resulting in imports. He also noted that the proposal would mandate more ethanol than can be physically blended into the fuel supply.

Others representing local electrical and independent refinery workers, gas station owners and small retailers further warned of skyrocketing compliance costs resulting from EPA's proposal.

Dominic Chamberlain, representing the local International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers union, said those costs "will threaten our very good paying jobs," for workers averaging about $80,000 annually and who "help strengthen Northwest Ohio's economy."

Dean Monske, who heads an economic development organization serving 17 counties in Northwest Ohio, said compliance costs "could harm our regional economy and hamper the momentum towards the growing energy industry" that has generated more than $3.6 billion in investment for Northwest Ohio just in the last three years.

The message from these officials couldn't have been clearer: RFS volumes that impose too much biofuel could bankrupt our refineries and eliminate the many jobs and other benefits that come with them.

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