

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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**Opening Statement**  
**Subcommittee Chairman Harley Rouda**  
**Full Committee Hearing**  
**“The Devastating Health Impacts of Climate Change”**  
**August 5, 2020**

Thank you, Chairwoman Maloney, for the opportunity to give an opening statement, and thank you for holding this important hearing.

As Chair of the Subcommittee on Environment, climate change has been front and center among my priorities. Over the course of the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Subcommittee has held a series of hearings focused on climate change. We’ve explored the early scientific consensus regarding climate action, a reality confirmed in the 1970s and 1980s by in-house scientists at major fossil fuel companies, such as Exxon and Shell, and later denied by those same companies once they started getting concerned that climate action would hurt their bottom line. In subsequent hearings and briefings, the Subcommittee laid out the devastating consequences of climate change on public health, how climate change is causing more frequent and severe natural disasters, and how climate change has already impacted our economic well-being.

What we have learned from this substantial work is that climate change can no longer be thought of as something that may or may not impact us *someday*. We are *already* experiencing the negative impacts as a result of decades of inaction – and people across the country and around the world will continue to suffer for decades to come if we continue down this path of inaction.

Now, let’s be clear – those focused on inaccurately downplaying real climate risks have blood on their hands. These efforts are deeply problematic and counterproductive – we cannot simply cherry-pick information to fit whatever narrative suits our desires or industry bottom-lines. In my opinion, engaging in ongoing climate denial efforts, in clear contradiction of decades of scientific evidence, is on par with the current administration’s efforts to shirk responsibility for the over 155,000 Americans who we have lost as a result of widespread misinformation and a distrust and disregard for science by leaders of this country.

As detailed in the Trump Administration’s *own* Fourth National Climate Assessment, the economic consequences of climate change are serious and far-reaching. According to this assessment, climate change could slash up to one-tenth of gross domestic product by the year 2100 – to put that in perspective, that’s more than double the losses we experienced in the 2008 Great Recession.

Instead of seizing upon these findings and other dire public health warnings expressed in this Assessment in order to ensure a livable world, the Trump Administration has worked tirelessly to undermine the efforts of previous administrations. In fact, as of July 15, 2020, the Trump Administration has officially reversed, revoked, or otherwise rolled back 68 major environmental policies, rules, and regulations – with 38 additional rollbacks still in progress. The current administration’s anti-climate actions create serious negative economic consequences for the short-term and long-term future of every American.

We must do more to protect the health and safety of all Americans – especially amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. A Harvard University study published in April 2020 found that an increase of just one microgram per cubic meter of pollution is associated with an 8% increase in the death rate due to the coronavirus. The study also found that COVID-19 mortality rates were higher in areas that suffered from long-term pollution – including low-income communities and communities of color. The same causes of climate change are exacerbating the effects and of the public health and economic crises caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

The testimony from the experts who have joined us today, including the testimony of Dr. Drew Shindell and Dr. Michael Greenstone who will testify to new and alarming figures regarding the costs of inaction climate change, further underscores the urgent need for congressional action to pass major climate legislation.

It could not be clearer. Climate change is an existential problem; it literally threatens all aspects of our collective existence as a human race – our health, our livelihoods, and our ability to survive and rebuild from the tragedies inflicted by nature. We hear a lot about the generational divides in American politics today, but there’s one thing that has always united us: Each generation wants their children to live better, happier, healthier and more prosperous lives than they did. If that does not happen, it feels like a reversal of the natural order. It makes me sick to think that my children, and my children’s children, will soon be standing at the dawn of a new century, looking back at all of us, wondering why we didn’t take the threat of climate change seriously, why we knew and did nothing. Did we not think they were worth it?

For these reasons, giving up and turning away from a problem is simply not an option. Collective action in the face of a rapidly changing world is tough, yes – but, in the words of President John F. Kennedy, speaking of our nation’s efforts to reach the moon, we choose to pursue great actions, “not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win.”

Last October former California Governor Jerry Brown testified before the Subcommittee on the current administration’s rollback of the Obama-era Clean Cars Rule, and he urged all of us: “Let’s get it done. Pass the laws, block the stupidity, and get back on the side of science and the environment.”

We do not have time to waste. This existential challenge and unprecedented moment require extraordinary action and it both the political and moral will to do the right thing. Let us be on the right side of history. Not just for ourselves – but for our children, our grandchildren, and for all future generations.

Thank you, Chairwoman Maloney.

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