

Chairman Rouda's Opening Statement at Subcommittee on the Environment's First Hearing on Climate Change

Opening Statement
Chairman Harley Rouda
Subcommittee on Environment
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Good afternoon. This hearing is the first in a series of hearings on climate change that the Oversight Subcommittee on Environment plans to hold during the 116th Congress. It is my goal that we can work in a bipartisan manner to examine the history of climate change, the effects of climate change that are currently being felt across this great nation, and solutions to the current climate crisis – solutions that not only will address this critical issue but create new industries and jobs for those countries who take a leading role.

It is our job, as representatives of the American people, to prevent the effects of climate change from getting worse. That's why I'm holding this hearing – not to point fingers at any of my colleagues, and not to chastise industry players and executives just for the sake of it. We're here to solve a problem of enormous magnitude, and the best solutions to big problems have always been forged by all of us coming together to devise sensible, feasible solutions that account for the diversity of American interests.

Today, we will affirm that the science on climate change has been known for decades. In 1977, Exxon Oil Company's own in-house senior scientist told the company's senior management that, quote, "there is general scientific agreement that the most likely manner in which mankind is influencing the global climate is through carbon dioxide release from the burning of fossil fuels."

This same scientist went on to say, in 1978, that we had a "time window of five to ten years before the need for hard decisions regarding changes in energy strategies might become critical." Exxon *acted* on this information, immediately launching further research into the effects of carbon dioxide on the planet, research that included extensive climate modeling. Royal Dutch Shell, in an internal document titled "The Greenhouse Effect," outlined Shell's extensive knowledge of climate change implications and warned that by the time global warming became detectable it could be too late to take decisive action. That was in 1988. These aren't liberal environmentalists making these dire predictions – they are oil companies' own management, recognizing the scientific reality and the need for serious action. These energy companies knew then what we all know now – the science matters.

The U.S. government also knew.

In 1988, Dr. James Hansen, a NASA scientist, testified before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources on a panel convened by one of our witnesses here today,

Senator Tim Wirth. Another one of our witnesses, Dr. Michael Oppenheimer, testified with Dr. Hansen on that panel, and together they warned the Senate – and the American people – of the dangers of a warming planet.

America listened: President Ronald Reagan created the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. President George H. W. Bush helped convene the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, an intergovernmental treaty recognizing the problem of climate change and calling on all nations to take efforts to address it. The treaty was ratified by unanimous voice vote in the Senate.

It seems incredible, I know, but in 1992 the U.S government agreed with 154 nations that, quote

“human activities have been substantially increasing the atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases, that these increases enhance the natural greenhouse effect, and that this will result on average in an additional warming of the Earth’s surface and atmosphere and may adversely affect natural ecosystems and humankind.”

In 1997, the nations of the world met in Kyoto and decided that the problem was serious enough that each nation needed to go further by making *binding* commitments to reduce emissions.

In 2015, the parties met in Paris, and, due in large part to President Obama’s and Secretary of State John Kerry’s in-depth negotiations with China, the parties came to a collective agreement that all nations in the world would work to keep the average global temperature rise below 2 degrees Celsius by the year 2100, and ideally below 1.5 degrees Celsius. That is the Paris Climate Accord.

The U.S. was part of this global consensus until June 1, 2017, when President Trump, contrary to overwhelming fact-based evidence from the scientific community and the direction set by Presidents Reagan and George H.W. Bush, announced his unilateral intention to withdraw the United States from the Paris Climate Accord.

This announcement was made almost 29 years to the day after Dr. Hansen testified that global warming was a threat to this planet and to humanity.

Now here we are, in 2019, and the federal government has taken very little action in response to climate change. The science hasn’t changed – the scientific evidence has been there all along – but the politics did.

Political disagreements are a hallmark of democracy, and I welcome constructive debates about *what to do* about the problem of climate change.

But politics should be separate from our acknowledgement of the problem itself. The science was clear then, and it is equally clear now, and our panel today is going to help us make sense of why the U.S. has not taken decisive action to address a problem that we’ve known for decades.

Today we are joined by former Senator Tim Wirth, geoscientist Michael Oppenheimer, and economist Jeffrey Sachs, all of whom have applied their considerable intellectual gifts to addressing one of the most important and imperative moral challenges we face today.

I believe that the U.S. can rise to meet this challenge and, to quote John F. Kennedy, we will do so “not because [it is] easy, but because [it is] hard.” As Americans, this is our time to lead the world as we have done many times throughout our history, for us, for our children, and for all future generations.

Thank you very much, and I now invite my colleague, the Subcommittee’s Ranking Member, Mr. Comer, to give a five-minute opening statement.

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