

**Opening Statement**  
**Chairman Elijah E. Cummings**

**Hearing on “The Need for Leadership to Combat  
Climate Change and Protect National Security”**

**April 9, 2019**

Good morning. Today, the Committee is honored to have two distinguished witnesses: former Secretary of State John Kerry and former Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel.

In addition to serving as key members of the Cabinet, both Secretary Kerry and Secretary Hagel served for many years in the United States Senate. They also served in our armed forces, and they both served with distinction in combat.

Secretary Kerry and Secretary Hagel, on behalf of the Committee, I thank you for your service to our nation. I also thank you for joining us today to discuss the threat that climate change poses to our country and our national security.

Just a few weeks ago, record-breaking floods forced parts of Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska under as much as eight feet of water. Secretary Hagel, as you know very well, Offutt Air Force base is home to U.S. Strategic Command, and although they are used to floods, this year was nothing like they have ever seen before.

Last September, Hurricane Florence caused massive damage to Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. As a result, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Robert Neller, warned that “1/3 the combat power of the Marine Corps—is degraded and will continue to degrade.”

For several decades, our national security leaders—including the two men sitting at our witness table—have been warning that we need strong and decisive leadership to combat climate change and to plan for the national security implications we are going to face.

These warnings have come from Democratic Administrations and Republican Administrations alike.

In fact, in the most recent National Climate Assessment—issued under the Trump Administration—13 federal agencies and more than 300 experts from around the country warned: “Earth’s climate is now changing faster than at any point in the history of modern civilization, primarily as a result of human activities.”

The Assessment found that our response to this crisis so far is not sufficient to avoid “substantial damages to the U.S. economy, environment, and human health and well-being over the coming decades.”

In addition, earlier this year, the President's Director of National Security, Dan Coats, warned that climate change is "likely to fuel competition for resources, economic distress, and social discontent through 2019 and beyond."

Director Coats also warned that heat waves, droughts, and floods driven by climate change are "increasing the risk of social unrest, migration, and interstate tension in countries such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Iraq, and Jordan."

Unfortunately, instead of mobilizing efforts to fight climate change, President Trump has attacked the science, weakened environmental protections, and undermined U.S. leadership abroad. In fact, when his Administration issued the National Climate Assessment last year, he stated: "I don't believe it."

The title of today's hearing is, "The need for leadership to combat climate change and protect national security." I understand that there may be differences of opinion on *how* we should respond, but there should be no uncertainty about *whether* we should respond.

If the President disagrees with the Paris accord, that is his prerogative, but what is he proposing instead? According to press reports, he is reportedly considering creating a White House panel to relitigate whether climate change is real. If this is true, that would be a huge step backwards for our nation and the world.

The true measure of leadership is whether we leave the world better for our children and grandchildren than we found it. Each day that we fail to act on climate change, we are risking the health and security of future generations.

For these reasons, our Committee is making climate change a top priority for this Congress. Today, the Committee is making a referral to our Subcommittee on Environment, which is chaired by Rep. Rouda, to launch a series of hearings that will take advantage of our Committee's unique and broad jurisdiction over all federal agencies—as well as over the Executive Office of the President—to identify opportunities for advancing concrete solutions.

We are asking Chairman Rouda's subcommittee to take a deep dive and to report back to the full Committee on their findings. With that, I yield to Chairman Rouda.

---