

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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**Opening Statement
Chairman Harley Rouda
Hearing on “Climate Change, Part IV: Moving Towards a Sustainable Future.”
Subcommittee on Environment
September 24, 2020**

Good afternoon. This is the final hearing in the Environment Subcommittee’s series on climate change. Last year, the Subcommittee explored the early scientific consensus on climate change, a reality confirmed in the 1970s and 1980s by internal scientists at major fossil fuel companies such as Exxon and Shell concluded that climate change was real and was caused by the combustion of fossil fuels. This reality was later denied by those same companies once the United States began to take action to address global warming. In subsequent hearings and briefings, the Subcommittee examined and laid out the current devastating consequences of climate change for public health, the frequency and severity of natural disasters, and our economic well-being.

We are seeing the devastating effects of climate change RIGHT NOW. In addition to the devastating loss of more than 200,000 lives from the coronavirus, we are also seeing climate-fueled disasters impact the safety and security of Americans across the country.

The entire west coast of the United States is currently on fire. Washington Governor Jay Inslee said it best, "These are not just wildfires, these are climate fires." We are experiencing destruction and loss of life on an unprecedented scale – and there are still many months of expected fire activity ahead. My home state of California’s wildfire season is already the most severe in modern history – more than 2.5 million acres have already burned, nearly 20 times what had burned at this time last year. In fact, the five largest wildfires in California’s history have all occurred in the last three years, and of these five wildfires, three have started this year.

As a result of warming ocean waters, we are also currently experiencing what is shaping up to be the worst hurricane season in history. The breakneck pace for named hurricanes has far outpaced the 11-storm seasonal average. In fact, we’ve already run out of names and are now using the Greek alphabet to name storms – this has only happened one other time in history.

And, to make matters worse, in August, amid a historic heat wave in the West, Death Valley, California saw 130-degrees Fahrenheit – which ranks among the top-three highest temperatures ever measured on the planet at any time, and may, in fact, be the highest ever.

I’ve often said that the difference between taking climate action and the continued abdication of our responsibilities will result in either a world of opportunity or an

apocalyptic reality. Unfortunately, we're already seeing what a lack of action means. Action is our only choice.

Especially when you take into how inaction on climate change would affect our economy. And let's be clear, this is not a partisan perspective, it is what we are being told by the experts. According to the Trump Administration's own Fourth National Climate Assessment, continued greenhouse gas emissions could decimate up to 10% of gross national product (GDP) by 2100. However, if we choose to act on climate change, and if nations meet the Paris Climate Accord's goal of maintaining a 1.5-degree Celsius rise in global temperature by 2100, global GDP would increase by \$20 trillion, compared with a 2-degree Celsius rise. Again, action on climate makes good economic sense.

By recognizing the challenge at hand, seizing this moment, and prioritizing justice and equity in the transition to the future, we have the potential to usher in a new era of economic growth, job creation, and opportunity for all Americans. While the challenge is great, the opportunities are greater.

Harnessing American ingenuity and innovation through investment and incentives will create the jobs of the future – indeed, it already has. Developing and deploying new and emerging technologies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and mitigating existing carbon pollution is good for business – some of the largest companies are already pivoting and making sizeable investments in these tools. Advancing strategies to decarbonize industry and achieve net zero emissions goals will result in economic growth – we're already seeing cities and states across the country rise to the challenge in the absence of federal leadership.

The federal government is the largest employer in the United States, the largest purchaser of goods and services in the world, and an important partner to states, localities, Tribal governments, the public and private sectors, and other countries. [The Oversight Committee's Climate Change Agenda](#) aims to utilize the federal government's unique position in the fight against climate change by making important reforms in the pursuit of greener, more efficient, and more just policies, programs, and processes.

Alongside Chairwoman Maloney, I am proud to introduce the [Federal Agency Climate Planning, Resilience, and Enhanced Preparedness Act](#) as part of this forward-looking agenda.

Climate change is an existential problem. It threatens every aspect of humanity's existence. The decisions we make NOW will affect life on earth for generations to come. We cannot afford to be idle. We do not have time to waste.

It's pretty simple. If we refuse to rise to meet this challenge, our children, grandchildren, and future generations will be left with an uninhabitable planet – and history will judge the actions we take now. This is an inflection point. When future generations look back at this moment, will we be able to say that we did all that we could? Or, will they tell us that we let them down? The eyes of the future are watching, and we will not get a second chance to get this right – we must look beyond our time to ensure a just and livable future for all.

Thank you. I now turn to the Subcommittee's ranking member, Mr. Green, for his opening statement.

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