

OPENING STATEMENT

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Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

“The President’s UN Climate Pledge: Scientifically Justified or a New Tax on Americans?”
Full Committee Hearing

April 15, 2015

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We are here this morning to discuss the carbon reduction target recently submitted by the Obama Administration to the United Nations. This target, which is known as the United States’ Intended Nationally Determined Contribution sets a goal of reducing carbon pollution across the nation by 26 to 28 percent below 2005 levels by the year 2025.

Before I get too far into my statement, I’d like to point out the fact that my colleagues in the Majority failed to invite anyone from the Administration to testify at today’s hearing.

It seems to me that the Administration is likely the best source to fill in any details regarding the proposal or to address any questions or concerns Members of this Committee may have. Despite this omission, I’m looking forward to hearing from today’s witnesses.

Some may say that the Administration’s carbon reduction goal is unrealistic or unwarranted; that addressing climate change will cause irreparable harm to the nation’s economy or that it is based on “unsettled” science. I disagree with such sentiments. I think the target put forward by the President is justified. It appears to strike the right balance between ambition and achievability.

And perhaps, most importantly, it sends a strong and much needed signal to the rest of the world about the seriousness of the United States in addressing the impacts of climate change. Such a position is critical to meaningful international engagement.

I have been clear in my position that the time to address climate change is now. The potential costs of inaction are too high for us to continue to drag our feet or put our heads in the sand.

A sobering report from a non-partisan and well-respected group of business and financial leaders, including Michael Bloomberg, Henry Paulson, and Tom Steyer, entitled, *Risky Business – The Economic Risks of Climate Change in the United States*, highlights the significant costs climate change has exacted and will continue to exact on our economy.

The report presents a long list of concerns, including rising seas, increased damage from storm surge, more frequent bouts of extreme heat, and shines a light on the cost of inaction to private businesses across the country.

However, the economic costs of inaction are not the whole story. There are also serious public health impacts associated with climate change. Greater risk of asthma attacks, heat stroke, food and waterborne as well as respiratory diseases are all consequences of a warming climate.

I know that some still question whether climate change is happening or if humans have contributed significantly to the impacts currently being observed.

I know such opinions will be expressed again today, but it seems to me that most of the world has moved beyond such debates and is instead focused on taking concrete steps to address the problem at hand.

We in Congress have to acknowledge that we are not the experts on the science, and that allowing partisan politics to distort the scientific understanding of climate change is cynical and short-sighted.

We, as a nation, must act today to address climate change if we are to preserve our quality of life for our children and grandchildren. The negative consequences of climate change are not abstract scientific predictions for the far-off future. We are facing some of these consequences now and they are affecting every American.

The President's Climate Action Plan and the goal submitted to the United Nations represent common-sense steps that will lead to a healthier environment, because acting on climate change is not only an environmental imperative, but a public health and economic one as well.

In closing, I'd like to draw on a recent op-ed from Bob Inglis, a former Republican Subcommittee Chairman of this Committee, and Jack Schlossberg comparing the challenge of addressing climate change to the space race. They state: "Climate change is only scary if we chose to sit, wait, and do nothing about it. Climate change is a chance for all of us to add a chapter to the story of American triumph and human progress. Courage of this scale will come from a people who are told they can do great things by leaders who believe that their people are capable of great things. We believe America will see opportunity in the danger of climate change just like we saw benefits on Earth from travel in space."

Thank you and I yield back the balance of my time.