Tuesday, February 05, 2013
House Energy & Commerce Committee
Business Meeting to Markup the Oversight Plan of the Committee for the 113th Congress
Rep. Kathy Castor

Opening Statement

Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to serve on the House Energy & Commerce Committee because the committee jurisdiction touches the lives of all Americans whether it is health, energy, the internet, the environment or the economy. The Energy & Commerce Committee has a tremendous responsibility to ensure that the products and services that we rely on are safe and that we put the United States in the best possible economic position, and that we do so while protecting a clean and healthy environment for future generations.

With respect to this Committee's work on energy issues, I strongly recommend that the committee dedicate additional focus to the serious threat to the economy and our communities brought on by a changing climate. The draft committee oversight plan mentions the intent "to monitor international negotiations on efforts to control greenhouse gas emissions" and "examine" and "monitor" various executive branch activities. The committee oversight plan for addressing the causes of climate change is very weak. The plan is not commensurate with the threat that climate change presents to our economy and environment. Scientific study after scientific study confirm that the planet is warming due to carbon pollution. Sea levels have risen 8 to 10 inches in the past 100 years, and that rise is accelerating.

One recent study published in the journal *Nature Climate Change* found that by continuing on our current path of greenhouse gas pollution, the seas will rise 5 feet by the first half of the next century. That would wipe out coastal areas of Florida, submerging 94 percent of Miami Beach and 20 percent of Miami. But the study also suggests that even if we immediately and significantly cut fossil fuel pollution, the best we could do is slow the seas' rise. Mr. Chairman, we have 2.5 million people in Florida that live on the coastline who would be in immediate danger.

The University of Florida has noted that a warming climate could raise sea levels by one to three feet (or 12 to 36 inches) over the next century (U.S. EPA 2002). Even a one foot increase has the potential to erode 100 to 200 feet of the state's beaches and lead to inundation of the coastal areas. Although most of Florida's urban development is located above elevations of 4.5 feet above sea level, the areas with elevations between 4.5 and 11

feet (such as the Keys, barrier islands, and the areas around Biscayne Bay and Charlotte Harbor) will likely experience increased flooding from higher sea levels and increased storm intensity (U.S. EPA 2002). Sea level rise also puts the water supply in the regions along the south coast at risk. The Biscayne Aquifer that supplies most of South Florida (Miami-Dade, Monroe, and parts of Broward Counties) is recharged mostly by freshwater from the Everglades. Sea level rise could lead to saltwater flooding in parts of the Everglades, threatening both that ecosystem and the aquifer that lies beneath it with salt water intrusion (U.S. EPA 2002). Furthermore, sea level rise would impact coastal habitats critical for Florida's coastal fisheries, waterfowl, shorebirds, sea turtles, manatees, and other wildlife species. Climate change is also expected to lead to an increase in marine diseases and harmful algal blooms (National Wildlife Foundation 2006). In fact, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) sent out a warning this month of just such a red tide alert off of certain Gulf beaches.

The science tells us that average state temperatures have varied substantially over the past century, with a warming trend since the late 1960s. Average winter rainfall has increased while average summer rainfall has decreased, noted the Union of Concerned Scientists. Extreme rainfall events have become more frequent. The sea level along Florida's Gulf coast- from the Everglades to the Panhandle- has steadily risen, increasing by up to eight inches over the past one hundred years. The number of miles of eroding beaches has been increasing as well. After all, they have seen the results of rising sea level- roughly 9 inches in the past 75 years, with an acceleration in the rate of rise in the past decade, according to a report from Florida Atlantic University. On Big Pine Key, for instance, what used to be a pine forest has turned into a tidal marsh.

As we heard earlier this morning at the Energy & Power subcommittee hearing on American energy, the increase in oil and gas resources has dramatically re-shaped the energy landscape here in America. The fact that we are relying less on *imported* oil is positive. However, the volatility of fossil fuels and the impact of carbon pollution on my state and Americans across the country has always been a concern of mine. In fact, the Energy Information Agency (EIA) recently reported that the average household spent $2,912 for gasoline in 2012, making up 4 percent of pre-tax income and tying 2008 for the highest percentage in roughly 30 years. This is despite an overall reduction in gasoline consumption.

To reduce consumers' exposure to such price volatility, we need to make use of our domestic renewable energy resources, become more energy efficient and conserve more energy. According to the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, the U.S. can meet 80 percent of its electricity needs in 2050 through renewable generation. In 2011, the U.S. generated 12 percent of its electricity from renewable energy sources. At that level of

generation, the Environmental and Energy Study Institute estimates that the renewable energy sector employed between 850,000-950,000 people, compared to 731,000 people in the oil, gas and coal industries. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, there could be 8.4 million jobs in solar photovoltaic and wind energy and 12 million jobs in biofuels, globally by 2030.

We can also save money and reduce harmful emissions by consuming less energy. According to the EIA, vehicle fuel efficiency will reduce gasoline use in the transportation sector by 1 million barrels per day in 2035. Energy efficiency has already been a game-changer and holds great promise in making us more energy independent and saving consumers' money. After all, energy not used means that consumers don't have to spend their hard-earned money and could put those savings to better use. EIA predicts that per capita energy use will decline by 15 percent from now until 2040 as a result of improving energy efficiency in appliances and vehicles. The National Academy of Sciences found that energy efficiency technologies could save 30 percent of the energy used in the United States.

This is all good news, but we can do much more. The committee can make a great difference in setting the agenda for bold, informed action. The International Energy Agency (IEA) expects that two-thirds of the economic potential to improve energy efficiency will remain untapped. The IEA expects the industrial sector to make the biggest gains in energy efficiency. This is groundbreaking because businesses realize that there are tremendous cost savings associated with energy efficiency and governments should enact policies to incentivize these actions. Unfortunately, the IEA also expects the global power generation sector to only meet slightly above 20 percent of its realized energy efficiency potential, forgoing almost 80 percent of energy efficiency potential. If our power generation sector can take the lead on energy efficiency here in the U.S., we can export that equipment and know-how. The IEA also estimates that cumulative investments in energy efficiency of $12 trillion will drive $18 trillion in economic growth as a result of fuel savings. Additionally, energy efficiency efforts can delay the lock-in of CO2 emissions by 5 years.

As policy makers, we have a responsibility to take action on the science of a changing climate and consider energy (demand in addition to supply), environmental and economic objectives. We have the talent and technology in this country to be the leader in energy efficiency and unleash a wave of investment and job-creation, we just need the will from our leaders. Climate change should be a bipartisan concern and demands bipartisan action. I look forward to working with my colleagues on energy issues and other important matters.