

## As Prepared for Delivery

Today's hearing seeks to examine the challenges of climate change risks and how they may intensify existing economic and environmental risks in our nation's vulnerable communities.

Communities around the nation at various times must confront flooding, extreme weather, and other events. And if these communities do not have the ability to prepare for, respond to, or recover from those events, the human harm and economic costs can be breathtaking.

Almost exactly [two years ago](#), as Chairman of the Committee, I led a bipartisan delegation, including Mr. Pallone, Mr. Shimkus, and Ms. DeGette on this panel, to review the response and recovery efforts in Puerto Rico following the devastating hurricanes that season.

The island's already decrepit electrical infrastructure was wiped out. Longstanding governance issues and other federal and local challenges delayed recovery, which led to the longest lasting power outage in American history, and all the resulting misery and harm from lack of energy.

The heart-wrenching bottom-line was: communities on the island did not have the adaptive capacity or resources to withstand and rapidly recover from the direct hit of a major hurricane.

We have worked to [improve the situation](#) there, but I expect we'll hear this morning that more needs to be done, and that environmental problems have intensified.

Lack of resources and lack of planning, are common issues we must confront when preparing for future risks. This is more urgent for so-called frontline communities, those that are economically disadvantaged and have environmental burdens and limited resources to provide for those in need.

Our goal here should be to ensure economically disadvantaged communities have the tools and resources to help address local environmental risks and the resources to ensure compliance with environmental standards and to provide resilience to future hazards.

The ingredients for accomplishing this come from policies that encourage and foster economic growth and that ensure communities have the information, practices, and resources to address their specific needs.

We will hear today on the second panel from Pat Ford, an expert in economic development, who will talk from his experience how EPA and Department of Commerce programs can help resurrect economic hope and address environmental concerns in economically disadvantaged, frontline communities. His experience helping towns suffering from industrial collapse and loss of tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs, and all the social and health impacts from that, speaks to the promise of economic revitalization in these communities.

The approaches here apply to communities with all manner of economic and environmental strain. In my own state of Oregon, years of mismanagement on our federal forests have exacerbated the damage and health impacts of wildfires. Meanwhile, mills closed, jobs disappeared and communities are left without the resources to provide essential services. Again, [we have worked to address](#) these issues at the federal level, but there remain local circumstances that will require local solutions.

Melissa Cribbins, from Coos County Oregon, can speak to the challenges of a region that has been recovering from economic decline, and how they must balance local environmental concerns and the need for jobs and economic resources necessary to provide for their community members.

And of course, on our first panel, we should sort through with EPA how its programs and assistance targeted to ensure environmental justice helps answer the needs for those frontline communities.

Mr. Chairman, whether to address climate change risks or current economic and environmental risks, our focus should be on practical steps to increase the economic and adaptive capacity of these communities, and the nation.

We demonstrated this in our bipartisan work to reauthorize EPA's Brownfields Program in the last Congress. Let's identify other bipartisan programs that leverage local knowledge, innovation, and economic health. And let's make sure disadvantaged communities have access to all the tools and programs offered by EPA and other agencies to makes lives better for their residents.

Thank you, and I yield back.