

OPENING STATEMENT

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Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

“Examining the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Process”

May 29, 2014

Good morning. I want to join the Chairman in welcoming our witnesses to this morning’s hearing. Today our Committee will hear testimony about the process that is followed in carrying out the scientific assessments of the U.N.’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. I hope that today’s hearing will be followed by a hearing at which scientists from the IPCC can actually present the findings of the 5th Assessment, because those findings are quite sobering and important for us to hear.

In the meantime, while the topic of today’s hearing is a legitimate one, namely, how the IPCC process can be improved, I am concerned that the real objective of this hearing is to try to undercut the IPCC and to cast doubt on the validity of climate change research.

For the benefit of Members who were not here in 2011, I would note that we had a hearing on this same topic back then, and the testimony to be given today echoes some of the claims made then. Ultimately, however, those claims were shown to be unfounded. Yet here we are again.

The reality is that the IPCC assessment is unprecedented in its scope and inclusiveness. The United States, along with 194 other nations, has arrived at a rigorous and open process that yields the most comprehensive and objective assessments of the scientific literature relevant to understanding climate change and its associated risks. We need only look at the results of the previous assessments to realize how much the IPCC has contributed to our understanding of climate change.

The latest assessment will be completed in October with the release of a synthesis report that integrates the results of each working group. Again, the IPCC’s message is clear: the climate is changing, humans are playing a significant role, and the time for meaningful action is now. All over the country, Americans are observing and responding to a changing climate. In Texas, record droughts and other severe weather events are putting a significant strain on regional economies, and presenting new challenges to the state’s infrastructure and its ability to respond to these accelerating threats.

Developing timely solutions to these challenges is critical, and the IPCC provides policymakers with the factual basis to do just that.

We are likely to hear today that political agendas distort the IPCC's summary for policymakers to make the impacts sound worse than they are or that the climate models or data the scientific assessments are based on are flawed. But we know that is not the case. In fact, if anything, the IPCC process of developing a consensus arguably results in a summary with more conservative estimates than some scientists believe are warranted—estimates that understate the impacts of climate change.

Let us be clear: the IPCC's summary document is policy-neutral and faithful to the underlying science. It is not a new assessment of the same information. It is not intended to be a substitute for the full assessment.

Mr. Chairman, we have a responsibility to listen to the facts and act to protect the American people from the growing risks of a changing climate. The IPCC makes clear to anyone who will listen that the science is well established and well accepted by the vast majority of climate scientists. We cannot continue to turn a deaf ear to the pleas from our constituents to start working towards solutions.

This hearing is a missed opportunity to consider the findings of the latest IPCC report and the kinds of actions the U.S. should be considering, and as I stated earlier, I hope that we will have such a hearing in the coming months.

In closing, I am committed to working with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to develop policies that address these new climate realities. But we aren't going to get very far if we spend our time continually revisiting a scientific debate that has already been settled. Nor will we get far if we continue a recent practice on this Committee of seeming to question the trustworthiness and integrity of this nation's scientific researchers. That does them a disservice and does not reflect well on this Committee. Mr. Chairman, climate change is real, its impacts are real, and the need to act is real. I sincerely hope that we will soon be able to work together to develop constructive policies to deal with that changing climate.

Thank you, and I yield back.