

Opening Statement
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Subcommittee on Environment
U.S. House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
“Policy-Relevant Climate Issues in Context”

April 24, 2013

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing, and I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today.

The reality of climate change is increasingly impossible to deny. Over the past 25 years, numerous scientists from the United States and around the world have appeared before Congress to testify about climate change. Countless peer-reviewed studies have shown that climate change is real and that humans are a significant contributing factor. Now we must shift the debate to planning and discuss what actions we should take to mitigate the environmental, economic, and health effects that will inevitably hit our communities.

The stated subject of this hearing is “policy-relevant” climate issues. Because a preponderance of scientific evidence shows that human activity is leading to changes in the global climate, I submit that all climate issues have become “policy-relevant.” The United States, a large historical producer and second largest current producer of greenhouse gases, bears a great responsibility to the rest of the world to ensure that we promote policies that will reduce the amount of greenhouse gases we continue to place in the Earth’s atmosphere. We have the talent and ability to take on this important leadership role; we should also, as a country, have the will to do so.

Glacial withdrawal, loss of sea ice, ocean acidification, and rising temperatures and sea levels are real and measurable problems. Although the effects of climate change are global, the impacts of this change are already felt throughout the U.S. Record droughts in the American Southwest and historic severe weather events throughout the country are recent examples. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and NASA, 2012 was the warmest year on record for the United States, and the nine warmest years have all occurred since 1998.

Climate change affects our economy. Oregon has developed a reputation for growing quality wine grapes, including the world-renowned pinot noir. Much of the quality is attributable to the climate in Oregon, where the pinot grapes grow in a temperature range of between 57 and 61 degrees, and even a minor variation in temperature can threaten the continued quality—and hence, value to the Oregon economy—of wines in the region.

Another important economic impact of global climate change in the Pacific Northwest and in many coastal areas is the effect of ocean acidification on the shellfish industry. My district is home to a thriving fishing community. In recent years, oceanic and atmospheric changes have caused low-oxygen content in the water—a condition known as hypoxia—that has created dead zones that kill fish, crab, and other marine life.

Agriculture and fishing are just two examples of industries concerned about climate change - they are looking to their policymakers for solutions.

Climate change also has broad implications on other aspects of our nation's economy. The federal government assists those who are hit hard by harsh weather events, and scientists point to increasingly severe weather patterns as further evidence of the changing climate. The Government Accountability Office recently released a report that, for the first time, lists climate change as a "significant financial risk to the federal government." The report adds "the federal government is not well-positioned to address the fiscal exposure presented by climate change."

As a nation, we are becoming too familiar with the consequences of waiting until the eleventh hour to develop solutions to the problems we face. Let's not make that mistake with something as serious as climate change. And even though we may have differences of opinion about what is causing climate change, but we can still discuss the economic gains we can make by investing in a clean energy economy, modernizing our infrastructure, and seeking energy independence. The United States has been a leader in renewable energy technology and climate research. We must continue our leadership if we intend to leave our children and grandchildren a clean and healthy environment in which they can thrive economically.

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