

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Roger Marshall at Environment Subcommittee Hearing on Ocean Health

Feb 27, 2019

Opening Statement

Thank you, Chairwoman Fletcher, for holding this hearing today to discuss a nuanced and significant issue. First off, I want to congratulate you on your appointment to chair the Environment Subcommittee. I look forward to working with you this Congress.

On this committee, we may not always agree on everything, but I hope we can agree on objectives and goals. Our objectives should be to thoughtfully listen to the science and theories surrounding these topics. And our goal, at least in my opinion, should be to leave the environment of this country and the world better than we found it for our children, grandchildren, and future generations so that they can flourish!

I have to be honest—the closest thing we have to oceans in my home state of Kansas are “amber waves of grain.” So this is a unique opportunity for me to learn about the relationship between climate and the oceans. I’m looking forward to hearing from our witnesses today and I hope we can find a way to talk constructively about these issues and—more importantly—about potential solutions.

Oceans cover more than seventy percent of the earth and contain more than ninety percent of life on our planet. Oceans, more specifically phytoplankton, produce most of the oxygen that we breathe, and absorb most of the carbon dioxide from the earth’s atmosphere, creating a constant cycle of oxygen and CO₂. Accordingly, it is impossible to overstate the importance of ocean health.

Like plant and animal life on land, marine life and oceans themselves evolve. The chemistry and ecology change and life adapts. It has been happening for millions of years. Unfortunately, scientific evidence suggests that the pace of change has increased over the last century, adding more stress to our complex marine ecosystems.

Some of this stress is the result of increased levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere that are absorbed by the ocean. The result is a change in the chemistry of the oceans in which researchers have noted increased water temperature, lower pH levels, and decreased oxygen levels in certain areas.

It is essential that we gain a better understanding of ocean chemistry, effectiveness of potential solutions, and mitigation of negative impacts. For instance, some species are proving more resilient and adaptable to changing conditions. One of our goals should be to better understand this resiliency and find ways to translate this knowledge to broader ecosystem sustainability.

One of our witnesses, Dr. Tom Frazer, is the Director of the University of Florida's School of Natural Resources and Environment. He will go into detail on his research to help us all better understand the impacts and changes in aquatic ecosystems, as well as discuss some of the potential solutions to maximize environmental and economic value of our oceans.

I believe advancing technology is the best path forward. As we speak, industry and governments around the world are examining carbon removal and carbon storage technologies. There are some big ideas out there—from direct air capture to genetically modified phytoplankton and giant kelp farms in the ocean that can absorb carbon dioxide.

We learned during our hearing two weeks ago that moving entirely to renewables is not realistic or sustainable, so we must consider solutions like these that can help reduce or remove emissions generated around the globe.

Researching, developing, and deploying these technologies will take a little time, but the payoff will be significant. Innovating our way to solutions has been a trademark of the American spirit since our country's inception. For example, in my practice as an obstetrician I have seen how private innovation and response to market demand have done more to improve and drive down the cost of healthcare than any law or regulation written here in D.C.

Just look at the evolution of medical imaging. 40 years ago, MRI machines and CAT scanners were just hitting the market. Now we have high resolution, microscopic cameras that reduce the need for invasive surgeries and provide us a window into human health in ways that we never thought possible.

Basic research, industry innovation, and a thriving marketplace are what brought these technologies and others like them into our lives, not government regulation. We need to prioritize investments that target the most impactful areas of research and provide specific steps for resiliency planning.

America must lead the way and partner with industry to develop innovative technologies and solutions to the problems discussed here today. I thank our witnesses for being here today and I yield the balance of my time.