



Opening Statement of Chair Kathy Castor
Hearing on “Making the Case for Climate Action: The Growing Risks & Costs of Inaction”
Select Committee on the Climate Crisis
April 15, 2021

As prepared for delivery

Welcome to our first hearing of the 117th Congress. I’m proud to return as Chair of the Select Committee. I look forward to working with the Members of the Committee on solving the climate crisis – with a focus on rebuilding our economy and securing environmental justice.

The case for climate action is as urgent as ever – and the consequences of inaction are too costly to bear. In just the first few months of 2021, we’ve seen the impact of extreme weather on infrastructure that is aging and fragile. Deadly winter storms knocked out power and water in Texas and across the south, tragically killing more than 100 people. Western states are facing a historic drought, with the water shortages and risk of wildfires that come with it. And on the East Coast, increasing rainfall puts dams and water infrastructure at risk for catastrophic collapse, as we are seeing at Piney Point on the edge of Tampa Bay.

The science is undeniable. In the past two decades, we’ve experienced the 10 hottest years ever on record, with 2020 near the top of the list. And as temperatures keep rising, we’ll continue to face the incalculable loss of life and property that follows climate-fueled disasters. Monster storms, destructive wildfires, persistent droughts, and extreme flooding – these risks are upending small businesses and harming our economy, threatening industries like agriculture, real estate, health care, and manufacturing.

Climate change also impacts the health of the American people. Worsening air and water quality, infectious diseases, and increased extreme weather affect mental health and well-being. Workers whose jobs expose them to the elements – from farmers to construction workers – are at increasing risk, as temperatures continue to rise. Increased levels of air pollution in communities of color correlate with higher levels of asthma and other respiratory diseases. Fenceline communities that experience greater exposures to toxins and other pollution every day are at greater risk when storms spread contamination across their neighborhoods.

Communities of color – which have experienced longstanding racism, systemic inequities, and disinvestment – are on the frontlines of the climate crisis. It’s a reality that we must reckon with as we move forward. We have a moral imperative to protect public health, ensure quality of life, and expand economic opportunity for every American, regardless of their zip code or the color of their skin.

The good news is we have the tools to better prepare for these threats and design effective solutions. Thanks to advances in monitoring and computing power, it is now possible to understand the physical and economic climate risks that are impacting different regions of the

United States. As the climate crisis makes extreme weather events more frequent, it is crucial that we plan for new scenarios and make long-term investments to keep Americans safe.

We have the tools, the science, and the policy solutions in front of us. We're proud of the great progress being made by cities, states, tribes, and businesses that are investing in clean energy and resilience. And we're thankful for President Biden's work on strengthening America's leadership abroad, especially as he prepares to welcome dozens of world leaders next week as part of his Leaders Summit on Climate. Now it's time for us in Congress to do our part.

Today, we have an excellent panel of witnesses to help us understand the growing risks and cost of the climate crisis. They will update us on the latest climate science, so we can better understand the changing climate and its physical and economic impacts on everyday Americans. We'll also shine a light on how certain Americans face these impacts disproportionately, especially within communities of color and low-income households. And we'll look at how we currently measure these impacts – and how we can improve to better protect American families.

I look forward to today's discussion.