

OPENING STATEMENT
Ranking Member Don Beyer (D-VA)
of the Subcommittee on Oversight

House Committee on Science, Space, & Technology
Subcommittee on Environment
Subcommittee on Oversight
“At What Cost? Examining the Social Cost of Carbon”
February 28, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The social cost of carbon (SCC) is a complex metric which our witness, Dr. Greenstone, has described as “the most important number you have never heard of.” Assessing and addressing the impact of climate change on current and future generations is critical. The social cost of carbon permits the government to help quantify the future economic damages caused as a result of carbon emissions that contribute to climate change and global warming.

This metric did not simply materialize out of thin, and dirty, air. It took a federal court judge to mandate its use during the Bush Administration. In 2009, the Obama administration convened an interagency effort to formalize a consistent value for it. We will hear today that this development process was transparent, has been open to public comment, has been validated over the years and, much like our climate, is not static and changes over time in response to updated inputs.

Although its use has been challenged in the courts recently, the courts have upheld the methodology used to obtain this estimate as proper, based on real science and appropriate economic models. As a Minnesota administrative law judge determined last April, a preponderance of the evidence supports the fact that the “Federal Social Cost of Carbon is reasonable and the best available measure to determine the environmental cost of CO₂ [Carbon Dioxide emissions]”

I am pretty certain we won't hear any of that from some of the Majority Members and their witnesses today. Instead, we will hear the same arguments made against climate regulations that we have heard before. Sadly, those anti-science arguments that both ignore the abundant scientific evidence that has shown climate change exists, and that fossil fuel production is the main contributor, also admonish virtually any responsible regulatory mechanisms to help protect our nation's citizens from the environmental, economic and public health harm resulting from climate change's global impacts. These individuals will argue that the Social Cost of Carbon is outdated, inaccurate, and not a proper regulatory mechanism for addressing climate change.

Four decades ago, we heard almost identical arguments in a different context. In 1982 the tobacco company RJ Reynolds produced internal talking points about the social cost of smoking when former Congressman Henry Waxman was holding hearings regarding the harm to the public's health from cigarette smoking. At the time, Rep. Waxman said the annual smoking related costs in lost productivity was \$25.8 billion and \$13.6 billion in annual medical costs. RJ Reynolds said that “attempts to estimate a dollar value of so-called costs of smoking are ill-

founded and unreliable.” More than one decade later, in 1994, the tobacco company Philip Morris was producing glossy brochures to combat the growing evidence revolving around the harm of cigarette smoking. One was titled: “Debunking the ‘Social Costs’ of Smoking,” and an internal memo from Philip Morris said simply, “Philip Morris does not believe that smoking has been shown to impose any social cost on society.”

We will hear similar arguments today regarding the social cost of carbon emissions from fossil fuels and their impact on climate change. Those arguments resonate loudly with the new Trump Administration, but contradict the economic analysis and scientific evidence that supports the use of the social cost of carbon. In a much publicized recent memo, Thomas Pyle, the head of Trump’s Department of Energy (DOE) transition team, stated that, “if the [social cost of carbon] were subjected to the latest science, it would certainly be much lower than what the Obama administration has been using” and he suggested ending the use of it in federal rulemakings. The memo went on to describe plans to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement, eliminating the Clean Power Plan, increasing federal oil and natural gas leasing, and lifting the moratorium on coal leasing. In other words, more fossil fuels, including the dirtiest of them all - coal, at greater cost to the environment.

Mr. Chairman, climate change is real, scientific evidence supports this reality, and as Members of the Science Committee we should be leading the fight to protect our Nation against its impacts. I hope my colleagues will be persuaded by the weight of evidence and work with me to promote policies that protect our future generations, not unduly burden them by promoting actions and policies that we know are harmful to their health, the environment and the economy.

Thank you. I yield back.