

Opening Remarks of Rep. Edward J. Markey
at the Congressional Science Briefing

“Undeniable Data: The Latest Research on Global Temperature and Climate Science”

November 14, 2011

Good Afternoon. I want to thank the distinguished scientists who are here today to present the latest research on global temperature trends and climate science. Welcome to my fellow Members of Congress, especially Rep. Waxman, for joining me today. And welcome to those who are here today in the audience and watching on the webcast. The halls of Congress have not seen much discussion of climate change recently. We will begin to change that today.

Individual climate scientists, the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and numerous American scientific professional societies have said for many years now that the Earth is warming. Yet many in the political arena have intentionally raised doubts about that conclusion.

When scientists warn about the global trends of melting glaciers or rising sea levels, pettifogging politicians point toward individual exceptions to slow the progress of clean energy and pollution cuts to a glacial pace.

But a special focus from the professional doubters has been to tear down the very idea that the Earth is warming at all. They have attacked the validity of the surface temperature record. Because while the natural world is complex, a thermometer is simple, and powerful.

So questions about the location of weather stations or the impact of urbanization were used to manufacture doubt about the fundamental fact that the Earth is warming. Intrigued by these arguments, Dr. Richard Muller -- one of the scientists here today -- established the Berkeley Earth Surface Temperature project. After two years of work, he and his colleagues made their findings public last month. They, too, found that the globally land temperatures are increasing and that location or urbanization problems were minor.

Their findings validated the previous temperature work of scientists at NOAA, NASA and around the world and complimented the additional lines of evidence in nature that point towards warming.

Although Dr. Muller and his colleagues did not examine the question of what is causing the warming, I hope that those who have questioned climate science will now be willing to look at ALL the conclusions of climate scientists with an open mind. They can start right now.

We will also hear from Dr. Ben Santer who has spent his career finding the fingerprints of human activity on our climate system. Over the course of his career, faint but “discernable” prints have now become convincing. Dr. William Chameides, vice-chair of the National

Research Council's America's Climate Choices committee, will discuss their recommendations to take action to limit the magnitude of climate change and prepare for its impacts.

It is important to remember that global warming will impact everyone in some way – Democrat or Republican – skeptic or not. Certain populations are more at risk than others. Vulnerable people like children, the sick, the elderly, and those who have limited means to respond to impacts caused by climate change will suffer the most. Party affiliations will have no consequence when more extreme weather bears down on our homes, or drought dries up our reservoirs.

Climatologists have described greenhouse pollution as the “steroids” of climate change – pumping up the risk of extreme weather events. The record-breaking disasters in 2011 are providing a glimpse of what the world may look like as warming pollution goes unchecked. The latest insurance analysis finds that the United States has experienced 15 billion-dollar weather disasters thus far in 2011.

We have such precious little time to act if we are to avoid encountering an environmental tipping point with dramatic consequences. Last year global carbon emissions rose by 6 percent, the largest single-year increase on record. The human and broader economic costs of climate impacts will only grow in significance while we wait to act. Other countries are taking this threat seriously. Australia just passed a set of bills designed to reduce carbon pollution and position their country to compete in the global clean energy race.

The attacks on climate science have been a colossal distraction from the debate we should be having in Congress – what actions should we take to reduce pollution, create jobs and reclaim our lead in the clean energy race? I hope this briefing will restart that debate.