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Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
Business Meeting on Draft Oversight Plan
Full Committee
February 5, 2013

Today we are starting consideration of the Committee's oversight plan. I agree with most of what is in the plan. But I have concerns about the lack of attention on one key energy issue: climate change.

Earlier today, the Subcommittee on Energy and Power held a hearing on North America's fossil and renewable energy resources. It highlighted the significant shift in oil and gas production in the United States.

The availability of oil and gas is a piece of the nation's energy puzzle. But there is another aspect that is critically important to the future of our country.

In his inaugural address, President Obama said that we must transition to a sustainable energy future. He said we must respond to climate change, because to do otherwise would "betray our children and future generations."

I was pleased to hear Chairman Whitfield acknowledge the importance of cutting greenhouse gas emissions at this morning's hearing. We now need to take the next step and hold hearings on why greenhouse gas emissions are such a threat.

Educating ourselves about climate change is not "alarmist" as Chairman Whitfield suggested in comments to the press. It's just common sense. It is what our Committee ought to be doing.

The world's premier scientific institutions tell us that climate change is caused by humans, is occurring more rapidly than expected, and is already having severe consequences. Perhaps most importantly for policy makers, the window to prevent far worse impacts is rapidly closing.

Satellite data tells us that sea levels have risen by 60% more than scientists projected would occur by now. Greenland and the Antarctic ice sheets are losing more than three times as much ice each year as they were in the 1990s. Arctic sea ice shrank to the lowest level in

observed history in 2012. These aren't projections – these are directly measurable effects of climate change in action.

And these effects aren't just happening somewhere far away. Last month, the top climate experts in the country released the draft National Climate Assessment, describing the climate change impacts we are experiencing already ... more frequent and intense heat waves ... droughts ... extreme storms like Superstorm Sandy ... and rising sea levels. And there are far worse impacts to come if we don't take action.

We are the Committee charged under the House rules with crafting the nation's energy policy. I believe that as we make these policy decisions, we should understand whether there is a connection between climate change and the extreme weather events that are already harming our nation.

Unfortunately, ignorance has a steep price. In 2011, we experienced a record 14 weather and climate disasters that each caused \$1 billion or more in damages. These disasters cost the U.S. over \$60 billion. The total damages we suffered in 2012 from weather and climate disasters will be even higher.

In November, the International Energy Agency (IEA) published its World Energy Outlook. IEA concluded that our current global energy system is unsustainable. The International Energy Agency also concluded that if the world does not take action to reduce carbon pollution before 2017, then all the allowable carbon dioxide emissions would be locked-in by energy infrastructure existing at that time.

In short, there is every reason to believe that if we fail to lead on climate change, we will betray our children and future generations and leave them with a damaged world.

Last Congress, Congressman Rush and I wrote 21 letters requesting hearings on important developments related to climate change. We requested these hearings because it is essential that each member of this Committee understand the seriousness of what the latest climate science tells us. We asked to hear from groups like the National Academy of Sciences, the World Bank, and the International Energy Agency. Unfortunately, we never received a single response from Chairman Upton or Chairman Whitfield.

The draft oversight plan that we consider today and tomorrow will chart the Committee's course over the next two years. Given the Chairmen's refusal to respond to our requests, we will be taking the unusual step of offering amendments so that we can make educating ourselves about climate change part of the plan. I think that's a reasonable thing for us to do.

I wish this step was not necessary and I hope Chairman Upton and Chairman Whitfield will reconsider. I want to work together with them and all members of the Committee on this vitally important issue.