

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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February 24, 2011

The Honorable Fred Upton
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ed Whitfield
Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy and Power
U.S. House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Upton and Chairman Whitfield:

Last week, as the House was debating whether to strip EPA of its authority to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, scientists published two major studies linking severe weather events to man-made global warming. We are writing to ask that the Energy and Commerce Committee hold a hearing to better understand these important scientific developments. We believe it would be irresponsible for the Committee to ignore the mounting scientific evidence linking strange and dangerous weather to rising carbon levels in the atmosphere.

In the first study, scientists from Canada and the United Kingdom examined the increase in severe rainstorms, snowfall, and other weather events in the Northern Hemisphere. Using detailed computer models, the scientists concluded that these increases are the result of rising greenhouse gas emissions, not natural variability in the atmosphere. They also found that the likelihood of extreme precipitation on any given day rose by 7% over the last half of the 20th century.¹ In a companion study, scientists at the University of Oxford examined the severe rains and floods that afflicted England and Wales in 2000. They found that rising greenhouse gas

¹ Seung-Ki Min et al., *Human contribution to more-intense precipitation extremes*, *Nature* (Feb. 17, 2011).

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emissions “substantially increased” the risk of these floods occurring by up to 90%.² These peer-reviewed studies were published in *Nature*, one of the world’s premier scientific journals.

The potential implications of these results are illustrated by multiple recent weather disasters. In the United States, severe flooding in Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee killed dozens and caused widespread property damage last year. Some scientists see evidence that the bitterly cold storms that gripped our nation this winter could be tied to climate changes.³ Internationally, unprecedented floods in Pakistan last year submerged one-fifth of the country, killing thousands, and devastating livelihoods.⁴ Similarly, floods following heavy rains displaced hundreds of thousands of people in northeastern Australia and damaged the agricultural and mining sectors.⁵ In Russia, yields of wheat and barley in 2010 fell by 30% following a summer of record-breaking heat and drought.⁶ This month, the United Nations warned that the worst drought in decades threatens the wheat crop in China.⁷

Two weeks ago, the Energy and Power Subcommittee held a hearing at which the lead Republican witness, Senator James Inhofe, testified that climate change is a hoax. At that same hearing, Rep. David McKinley said that man-made global warming is an “issue that the scientists are still debating.”⁸ Chairman Fred Upton recently said at a public forum that he does not believe climate change is man-made.⁹ When Rep. Blaine Luetkemeyer offered an amendment on the floor last week defunding the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the world’s leading authority on climate change science and the recipient of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize, he said the IPCC is “engaged in dubious science.”¹⁰

² Pardeep Pall et al., *Anthropogenic greenhouse gas contribution to flood risk in England and Wales in autumn 2000*, *Nature* (Feb. 17, 2011).

³ *Cold Jumps Arctic ‘Fence,’ Stoking Winter’s Fury*, *New York Times* (Jan. 24, 2011).

⁴ *Pakistan Flood Sets Back Infrastructure by Years*, *New York Times* (Aug. 26, 2010).

⁵ *Floods Take Toll on Australia Economy*, *New York Times* (Jan. 4, 2011).

⁶ *Drought in Russia Ripples Beyond the Wheat Fields*, *New York Times* (Aug. 27, 2010).

⁷ *U.N. Food Agency Issues Warning on China Drought*, *New York Times* (Feb. 8, 2011).

⁸ House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Energy and Power, *Hearing on H.R. ____, The Energy Tax Prevention Act of 2011*, 112th Cong. (Feb. 9, 2011).

⁹ National Journal Live, *Conversations with the Chair: Energy and Commerce Chairman Fred Upton* (Feb. 8, 2011) (online at <http://www.nationaljournal.com/conversations-with-the-chair-energy-and-commerce-chairman-fred-upton-20110208>).

¹⁰ Statement of Blaine Luetkemeyer, *Congressional Record*, H1315 (Feb. 18, 2011).

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These assertions are reckless and at odds with the overwhelming scientific consensus. Yet they are the predicate for legislative proposals being passed by the Republican majority on the House floor. That is why it is imperative that the Committee have an understanding of the science of climate change and the impact carbon pollution may be having on the weather in the United States and abroad. We cannot legislate wisely if we do not know what we are doing.

We therefore request that you convene a hearing to discuss the new studies linking climate change and extreme weather events and invite the principal authors to testify about their findings.

Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member



Bobby L. Rush
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Energy and Power