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HENRY A. WAXMAN, CALIFORNIA
RANKING MEMBER

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515–6115

Majority (202) 225–2927
Minority (202) 225–3641

May 23, 2011

The Honorable Fred Upton
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Upton:

We are writing to request that you hold a hearing on climate change to examine two important new reports, one from the National Academy of Sciences and one from the Vatican. Both reports find that climate change is occurring and that urgent action is needed to address its dangers.

On May 12, 2011, the National Academy of Sciences, our nation's preeminent scientific organization, released a new report entitled "America's Climate Choices."[1] This study was requested by Congress in 2007 to examine the issues associated with global climate change and provide recommendations on the most effective steps and strategies to address it. The study participants included members of academia, government, business and industry, nongovernmental organizations and the international community. The study participants were charged with writing a consensus report that provides authoritative analyses to inform and guide our response to climate change.

The National Academy of Sciences found that "climate change is occurring, is very likely caused primarily by human activities, and poses significant risks to humans and the environment." The Academy called delaying action "imprudent" and urged that the United States should begin ramping down emissions as soon as possible and should reduce greenhouse gas emissions "substantially over the coming decades." Some of the reasons for action cited in the report are:

- The faster emissions are reduced, the lower the risks posed by climate change. Delays in reducing emissions could commit the planet to a wide range of adverse impacts,

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[1] National Research Council of the National Academies, *America's Climate Choices* (May 2011).

especially if the sensitivity of the climate to greenhouse gases is on the higher end of the estimated range.

- Waiting for unacceptable impacts to occur before taking action is imprudent because the effects of greenhouse gas emissions do not fully manifest themselves for decades and, once manifested, many of these changes will persist for hundreds or even thousands of years.

- The sooner that serious efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions proceed, the less pressure there will be to make steeper (and thus likely more expensive) emission reductions later.

- The United States and the rest of the world are currently making major investments in new energy infrastructure that will largely determine the trajectory of emissions for decades to come. Getting the relevant incentives and policies in place as soon as possible will provide crucial guidance for these investment decisions.

- The risks associated with doing business as usual are a much greater concern than the risks associated with engaging in strong response efforts. This is because many aspects of an "overly ambitious" policy response could be reversed if needed, through subsequent policy change; whereas adverse changes in the climate system are much more difficult (indeed, on the timescale of our lifetimes, may be impossible) to "undo."[2]

A May 11 report commissioned by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences at the Vatican also emphasized the dangers of climate change.[3] The Pontifical Academy operates under the direct protection of the Pope to promote the progress of mathematical, physical, and natural sciences. It has had 76 Nobel Prize winners among its members.

The report recognizes that human activities are causing dangerous climate change and urges prompt and unequivocal action to curb greenhouse gas emissions:

> We call on all people and nations to recognize the serious and potentially irreversible impacts of global warming caused by the anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants, and by changes in forests, wetlands, grasslands, and other land uses. We appeal to all nations to develop and implement, without delay, effective and fair

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[2] *Id.*

[3] Working Group Commissioned by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Fate of Mountain Glaciers in the Anthropocene (May 11, 2011) (online at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_academies/acdscien/).

> policies to reduce the causes and impacts of climate change on communities and ecosystems. … By acting now, in the spirit of common but differentiated responsibility, we accept our duty to one another and to the stewardship of a planet blessed with the gift of life.

We request that you call a hearing to receive testimony from the authors of these reports. While the conclusions reached in these reports reinforce what scientists have been telling us for years, they illustrate the remarkable scientific consensus on the issue and present constructive efforts to find solutions. We believe members would benefit by hearing from the authors of these reports, particularly since a majority of the Committee voted earlier this year to deny the existence of climate change.

Holding a hearing with the authors of the National Academy of Sciences report and the Vatican report would help members understand the urgent need for action and the serious consequences of inaction. It could also help lay the foundation for constructive work in the Committee on the issue of climate change.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member

Bobby L. Rush
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Energy and Power

cc: The Honorable Ed Whitfield
Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy and Power