

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

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January 19, 2012

The Honorable Fred Upton
Chairman
Energy and Commerce Committee
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 month, an article in the *New York Times* described how thawing permafrost in the Northern Hemisphere could release dangerous amounts of carbon and methane into the atmosphere.¹ We request that you schedule a hearing on the concerns raised in this article and the implications for climate change.

Permafrost is perennially frozen ground that includes organic material such as leaves and roots. When permafrost warms, the organic material begins to decay and release methane and carbon into the atmosphere. Scientists estimate that permafrost contains twice as much carbon as contained in the entire atmosphere.

Scientists worry that if the permafrost starts to thaw, the decomposition of permafrost could become a growing source of greenhouse gases. Some scientists fear the melting permafrost could become a “tipping point” that may be impossible to stop, creating a “chronic

¹ *As Permafrost Thaws, Scientists Study the Risks*, New York Times (Dec. 16, 2011).

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source of emissions that will last hundreds of years.”² Other scientists urge more research to understand whether observed methane emissions are new, increasing, or simply recently detected.

We respectfully ask that you to schedule a hearing on this issue as soon as possible.

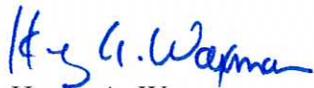
Last year, we sent you multiple letters requesting hearings on climate change. On May 23, 2011, we asked that you schedule a hearing on two new reports from the National Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Sciences at the Vatican. On October 13, we requested a hearing on the practice of natural gas flaring in North Dakota, which releases millions of tons of carbon dioxide each year. On October 28, we requested that you hold a hearing on a new analysis by Richard Muller, a prominent climate change skeptic, finding that global warming is real. On November 3, we urged you to schedule a hearing on the impacts of climate change on crop yields. And on November 18, we asked for a hearing on a new International Energy Agency report concluding that the world has just five years to shift to low-carbon energy sources to avert the worst effects of climate change.

We have received no response to these requests.

Your position and those of your Republican colleagues in the House is hard to understand. You and your colleagues say that you do not accept the scientific consensus that climate change is real and is caused by man because the science is “not settled.” Yet you and other House Republicans have voted to cut funding for climate science, and you have refused to hold hearings to inform the Committee about the state of the science.

We reiterate our request for Committee hearings so that members can hear from the leading experts about the causes and impacts of climate change.

Sincerely,


Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member


Bobby L. Rush
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Energy and Power

² *Id.* (quoting Josep G. Canadell, a climate scientist at Australia’s Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation).