

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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January 26, 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:

We are writing to urge you to hold a hearing on a recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that finds “increases in atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases” have contributed to climate extremes and extreme weather events around the world.¹

There is mounting evidence that climate change is already beginning to affect the United States. According to the National Climatic Data Center, 14 weather-related disasters that cost more than \$1 billion struck the United States in 2011, a record number.² Heavy rainfall and melting snowpack caused the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers to swell to record high levels in the spring and summer, flooding thousands of acres of farmland and destroying homes. Drought

¹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Summary for Policymakers: Special Report on Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation* (Nov. 18, 2011) at 6 (hereinafter “IPCC Report”).

² National Climatic Data Center, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, *Billion Dollar U.S. Weather/Climate Disasters* (online at www.ncdc.noaa.gov/oa/reports/billionz.html) (accessed Jan. 23, 2012).

across the South and Southwest destroyed crops, killed livestock, and created perfect conditions for historic wildfires, causing \$10 billion in damages.³ Heavy rains struck again in the late summer, as Hurricane Irene moved up the Atlantic coast and caused more than \$7 billion in flood damage in New Jersey, New York, Vermont, and other New England states.⁴

Other weather-related records were broken last year as well. Texas had the driest year on record since 1895; New Mexico and Oklahoma both experienced the second driest year on record.⁵ Nationally, nearly 10% of the country suffered “exceptional drought,” a record high.⁶ The 2011 summer was the second warmest on record in the continental United States, but Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Louisiana experienced their hottest summers ever. The Oklahoma summer was the warmest period ever recorded for any state.⁷

The IPCC report, a summary of which was released on November 18, 2011, examines the most recent scientific studies on the relationship between anthropogenic climate change and heat waves and other climate extremes. The IPCC report finds that it is “very likely that the length, frequency and/or intensity of warm spells, or heat waves, will increase over most land areas” because of climate change.⁸ According to the report, the frequency of heavy precipitation likely will also increase over many areas of the globe, even as droughts could also intensify.⁹

We believe Congress must examine the costs of continued inaction to address man-made climate change. We urge you to schedule a hearing so members can hear expert testimony about the latest IPCC report and understand the economic and human consequences of unabated climate change.

Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member



Bobby L. Rush
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Energy and Power

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ National Climatic Data Center, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, *Annual State of the Climate: Drought 2011* (online at www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc/drought/) (accessed Jan. 19, 2012).

⁶ National Drought Mitigation Center, *DroughtScope* (Winter 2012) at 4.

⁷ National Climatic Data Center, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, *Annual State of the Climate: National Overview 2011* (online at www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc/national/2011/13) (accessed Jan. 19, 2012).

⁸ IPCC Report at 10.

⁹ *Id.* at 10-11.