

“Now or Never: The Urgent Need for Ambitious Climate Action”

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

When: Thursday, April 28th 10 AM

Testimony:

I am Miami-Dade County, Florida, Mayor Daniella Levine Cava and I have the distinct privilege to represent a growing, vibrant, and diverse community of almost 3 million residents and a quarter million businesses that welcome more than 20 million visitors annually to our beautiful beaches, thriving economy, and cultural offerings.

I'd like to take a moment to recognize our five congressional members representing the great State of Florida, Representatives Bill Posey, Michael Waltz, Dan Webster, Charlie Crist and the honorable Carlos Gimenez – my predecessor, and previous Mayor of Miami-Dade County Florida.

Under his leadership, Miami-Dade County began to make key investments in adaptation, looking to protect our residents, our environment, and our assets long past his term in office. I am proud to continue building atop the foundation he established in Miami-Dade, and our shared efforts are the clearest sign of the bipartisan nature of this very issue.

In Miami-Dade, our environment IS our economy. It is what attracts visitors and fuels our prosperity. Truthfully, we are the canary in the coal mine for climate change.

But Miami-Dade is more than just its beaches and tourist destinations. For our hardworking residents, we are home – a home located in perilous proximity to rising seas and stronger storms, with significant exposure to our heating climate, and surrounded by an ecosystem threatened by these very changes.

Recent scientific reports released by the United Nations and others have made it abundantly clear that we must transform our “business as usual” attitude in order to protect life on our planet and in our coastal cities. Our seas are rising, and extreme weather events are becoming the new normal. The cost of inaction is already too great, and it is only growing.

Last year, extreme weather cost economies and governments around the world hundreds of billions of dollars – a cost expected only to grow dramatically. And this accounting does not include any of the other socio-economic effects of climate change, which range from ecosystem degradation, disruption of our global food and water supplies, to increases in vector-borne diseases, and mass displacement following floods and wildfires— and something Miami-Dade is particularly attuned to —hurricanes.

Back home in South Florida, we have already seen 10 inches of sea level rise over the last century. But unlike other types of flooding, long-term sea level rise will not recede. My community expects to see between 21 and 54 inches of sea level rise in the next fifty years. No longer can we afford to focus ONLY on mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions – we must take immediate action to adapt and thrive within this new reality.

The IPCC report is clear: we must take deliberate steps NOW to transition away from our dependence on fossil fuels and toward renewable energy, we must take our changing climate into account in decisions about the future of our infrastructure and growth, and we must integrate equity into our adaptation plans to ensure that we adapt to climate change as a community, together, and without leaving anyone behind.

In Miami-Dade, because we are directly exposed to the immediate effects of climate change, we have taken these recommendations seriously and reimagined every aspect of our local government to respond decisively.

Because we live at sea level, we must prepare for coastal property damage from storms and flooding. Because our water supply comes from our underground aquifer, we must address saltwater intrusion and find ways to protect our fresh water source. And because of the intersectional challenge of poverty, we are exposed to greater health risks. Our children, elderly, and other vulnerable residents suffer more sickness when pollution leads to an increase in asthma and heart disease. Our poorer and less protected residents suffer heat stroke if left without the protection of air conditioning. What's more, many private insurance companies are pulling out of our community, leaving residents to assume climate risk on their own.

Last Earth Day, I proudly announced Miami-Dade County's commitment to the International Race to Zero, along with over 4,500 other governments, businesses, investors, and academic institutions. This commitment sets our county on a unique path to net zero carbon emissions. We do this by transitioning our public transit and county vehicle fleets, advancing conservation and reparation efforts in our Bay and across the Everglades – our river of grass which captures and stores carbon more efficiently than any technology out there – and by educating our businesses and residents about ways to save money, energy, and water by conserving and reducing our waste.

We are building mobility systems to reduce carbon fuel consumption. We are expanding green and blue spaces, and planting trees to populate our urban tree canopy. We are reducing our waste and water use, and repurposing waste to fuel our cities.

We also proudly released our landmark Climate Action Strategy – which we believe can be a model of clear-eyed and forward-looking local governance that takes into account and acts for our environment.

Our Strategy will even help provide a template for others through our partnership with the ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, who joined me to unveil our plan at the COP26 last November.

We are also collaborating through the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact, which brings together over 100 local governments, 6 million people, 15 million visitors, and many non-governmental and private partners. Together, we work on a consensus sea level rise projection every 5 years and a Regional Climate Action Plan that helps businesses, governments, and residents stay informed.

We are a founding member of the International Extreme Heat Alliance and I appointed the world's first Chief Heat Officer, an action now replicated in cities around the globe.

Throughout my administration, we are accelerating adaptation, integrating sea level rise into design guidelines, embedding climate principles into our growth master plans, and collaborating with others to learn together and share best practices

Mitigation is no longer enough, and we must implement bold adaptation measures to ensure no resident is displaced due to rising seas. Our comprehensive Sea Level Rise strategy – which we released in 2021 – prioritizes septic to sewer transfers, that will protect public health and the health of Biscayne Bay

We're expanding our EEL program – Environmentally endangered Lands program, which not only helps to improve water quality in Biscayne Bay, but is also a critical component to the restoration of America's Everglades...A bipartisan issue important to Floridians and championed by Congressional members from across the State of Florida – our Florida members present here today included.

And as you see, we are not going at it alone. An issue as expansive as climate change cannot be pursued entirely at the local level. It will take collaboration across municipal, state, and even national boundaries. It will take investment from the public and private sector. It will take our brightest and most determined minds, and our largest and most compassionate hearts.

And most of all, it will take transparency, greater understanding, and real efforts to bridge divides and address the needs of diverse constituencies, all of which will need to be invested in our fight against climate change. This is exactly where the Federal government can step in as a funder and convener at the highest level.

As I mentioned before, we will need to look to new ways of thinking and brand new ideas that enable us to continue our way of life apart from fossil fuel dependence. Our federal government can step in and provide crucial funding for research on the cutting edge. Much like our government has played a crucial role in facilitating and leading to the discoveries of the internet and mobile phones, we need a new focus on resilient and sustainable technological innovation. The Federal government has a big role to play here.

In the short term, we also need your support. Especially at the local level, there are significant financial barriers to taking on the size and scale of infrastructure and resiliency projects that will protect our coasts, our communities, and our economies. We need the federal government to underwrite and support these larger scale projects so

we can move quickly, make the necessary adaptations, and ensure that no community is adversely affected by their inability to fund transition or adaptation plans.

And lastly, the federal government can continue to hold these sorts of high-level meetings, to shed light on this vital issue, and coordinate regional and multi-state response plans. As I referenced earlier, Miami-Dade has taken a proactive stance in working with our regional partners to plan and support climate adaptation. We do this not just from an ethical position as regional leaders, but from the practical region. We know that when we support our neighbors, they will be able to support and work with us.

When it comes to our planet and our environment, we need to truly understand that we are all in this together. We share one planet, one history, and we must be united by one purpose.

When we plan, we must acknowledge the influence that historic and current structural inequality have had on our society. The institutions of the past that have led us to where we are today have unfairly aided some at the cost of others, and have produced and reproduced inequalities that undermine our ability to move forward, together.

If we ignore our past, we will continue to carry it with us – whether it is in the legacy of greenhouse gasses in our atmosphere or in the shackles of inequality that entrap communities on the margins and limit their paths forward.

And sooner or later, we will all pay for it. The question then becomes: how should we move forward equitably, sustainably, and cooperatively? We can only do this well, if we do it together.

A cost-benefit analysis of measures to adapt provide us with rays of hope as we begin to reverse the damage done. In Southeast Florida alone, every dollar invested in climate and disaster mitigation today will save us \$4 in disaster recovery later. Market solutions are bearing fruit and we will continue to invest in promising innovations.

Our federal government and our leaders in Washington DC have a huge role to play in leading this innovation forward, in funding adaptation projects at larger scales, and at bringing together leaders, stakeholders, communities, and businesses to forge an equitable and prosperous path forward. We are doing our part and counting on you to do yours as well.

The path we are embarking upon not only reduces our greenhouse gas emissions, but also helps guarantee that our communities have clean air to breathe, fresh water to drink, and a thriving ecosystem in which to live, work, and play. This “all-in” strategy will ensure that NO community is left behind as we work to solve these challenges and develop a new blue-green economy that builds sustainably and resiliently far into the future.

Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava | Biography

Daniella Levine Cava was elected as Miami-Dade County's first female Mayor in November 2020 following a 40-year career as a social worker, lawyer, and advocate for South Florida families. Originally from New York, and raised across North and South America, she graduated from Yale College with an honors degree in psychology, and from Columbia University with graduate degrees in law and social work. After moving to Miami-Dade with her husband, Mayor Levine Cava worked at Legal Services of Greater Miami serving children in the school system, and at the Guardian Ad Litem program where she founded Voices for Children. She subsequently served as state administrator for foster care and adoptions in Miami-Dade and Monroe counties. She founded Catalyst Miami in 1995 where she dedicated two decades to building prosperity and civic leadership in all our communities.

Levine Cava was elected to the County Commission for the first time in 2014 and served six years before being elected as Mayor. She has empowered small businesses, increased community policing in underserved areas, improved transit options and housing affordability, protected the environment and addressed climate change. She oversees more than 28,000 employees, serves nearly 3 million residents, and manages a \$9 billion annual budget. Mayor Levine Cava's administration is focused on building a stronger, more inclusive and more resilient Miami-Dade by directly engaging with residents to make local government more responsive, transparent, and accountable.