

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

2321 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6301

(202) 225-6371
www.science.house.gov

October 31, 2017

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

The Committee on Science, Space, and Technology is conducting oversight of a recent report published on October 24, 2017 by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) entitled, *CLIMATE CHANGE: Information on Potential Economic Effects Could Help Guide Federal Efforts to Reduce Fiscal Exposure*. The report concludes that climate change will lead to increased economic damages for the United States in the future.¹ According to the highlights of the report, GAO was tasked with reviewing the potential economic effects of climate change and risks to the federal government.²

GAO relied on two studies in making its recommendation that the federal government should use potential economic effects of climate change when crafting federal policy. The first study, the *American Climate Prospectus*, was originally published in 2014 by the Rhodium Group.³ The organization released an update to this study in June 2017. The heavy reliance on this study raises concerns considering that it is a non-peer reviewed document that has not received the same scrutiny as many other scientific documents used in similar reports.

Relying on non-peer reviewed work has long been discouraged when working in fields of science. In 2010, the InterAcademy Council, an international organization of 2000 science academies tasked with overseeing the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), warned that using non-peer reviewed sources is controversial and could be blamed for

¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Climate Change: Information on Potential Economic Effects Could Help Guide Federal Efforts to Reduce Fiscal Exposure* (2017), available at <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-720>.

² *Id.*

³ Rhodium Group, *American Climate Prospectus: Economic Risks in the United States* (2014), available at https://gspp.berkeley.edu/assets/uploads/research/pdf/American_Climate_Prospectus.pdf.

errors in IPCC reports.⁴ The InterAcademy Council went on to say that guidelines should be created to ensure that unpublished or non-peer reviewed literature is adequately evaluated and even flagged in reports.⁵

Unfortunately, this is not the first time this study has been used in a government report. In 2016, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) released a report on the potential of increased hurricane damage, which also relied heavily on the same Rhodium study.⁶ Instead of utilizing other academic literature or international climate organizations, such as the IPCC, CBO and GAO both chose to use information that often contradicts information from other peer-reviewed science. For instance, the CBO report disregards the confidence levels of the IPCC in its latest Assessment Report, as well as historical government data that hurricanes have not increased in intensity or frequency.⁷ These data points would not indicate increased hurricane activity, and thus damages, in the future to the extent provided in the report.

Furthermore, it appears that the study used in the GAO report is connected to political advocacy, which could affect how the information is presented and impact the quality of its science. The Rhodium Group was commissioned for this study by the Risky Business Project, an organization founded by Michael Bloomberg, Henry Paulson, and Tom Steyer.⁸ These individuals have a history of funding one-sided advocacy campaigns as well as political elections that align with their agenda.⁹ Their funding of this study blurs the line between science and advocacy and taints the conclusions of the GAO study. Since GAO largely based its conclusions on this study, the Committee has many questions about why this particular study was chosen as the basis for many of GAO's conclusions.

Given that the report utilizes questionable sources and appears to ignore a wealth of peer-reviewed scientific studies, the Committee has concerns about the integrity of the GAO study process as well as its impartiality. In order for the Committee to better understand GAO's decision-making in this particular instance, we request the following information no later than November 14, 2017:

⁴ InterAcademy Council, *Climate Change Assessments: Review of the Processes and Procedures of the IPCC* (2010), Opening Statement, Shapiro, Harold T., available at <http://reviewipcc.interacademycouncil.net/OpeningStatement.html>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ U.S. Congressional Budget Office, *Potential Increases in Hurricane Damage in the United States: Implications for the Federal Budget* (2016), available at <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/51518>.

⁷ United Nations, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Fifth Assessment Report, Working Group I, Chapter 2, *Observations: Atmosphere and Surface* (2013), available at http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg1/WG1AR5_Chapter02_FINAL.pdf.

⁸ Bastasch, Michael, *Congressional 'Climate Change' Report Relies on Work Funded by the Democrat's Largest Donor* (2017), available at <http://dailycaller.com/2017/10/24/congressional-climate-change-report-relies-on-work-funded-by-the-democrats-largest-donor/>.

⁹ *Id.*

- All documents and information related to the decision by the Natural Resources and Environment and the Applied Research and Method section's decision to rely upon the Rhodium Group study published in 2014.

Additionally, to better assist the Committee in understanding GAO's decision-making process, I request a staff briefing by the appropriate GAO staff on this matter. I ask that you schedule this staff meeting no later than Tuesday, November 7, 2017.

The Committee has jurisdiction over environmental and scientific research and development programs and "shall review and study on a continuing basis laws, programs, and Government activities" as set forth in House Rule X. This request and any documents created as a result of this request will be deemed congressional documents and property of the House Science Committee.

When producing documents to the Committee, please deliver production sets to the Majority Staff in Room 2321 of the Rayburn House Office Building and the Minority Staff in Room 394 of the Ford House Office Building. The Committee prefers, if possible, to receive all documents in electronic format. An attachment to this letter provides additional information regarding producing documents to the Committee.

If you have any questions about this request, please contact Science, Space, and Technology Committee staff at 202-225-6371. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Lamar Smith
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Ranking Minority Member, House Committee on Science, Space and Technology

Enclosure