

Opening Statement

“The National Security Implications of Climate Change”

Committee on Science and Technology Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight September 27, 2007

The purpose of today’s hearing is to “examine current thinking on the nature and magnitude of the threats that global warming may present to national security.” I have experience with this issue. This April, I participated in a hearing on the same topic before the Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming. The issue was not new to me then either. As Chairman of the Science Committee, I held numerous hearings on this topic.

That I chaired related hearings is evidence that I believe it is important, but increasingly, discussions about climate change are dominated by alarmism instead of common sense. As global warming has become more and more popular politically, predictions of the Earth’s future have become more and more dire and images of the world a degree warmer sound almost post-apocalyptic. Some of the scenarios I am told we are destined to face include: increased border and immigration stress on the United States from Mexico and the Caribbean, a widening wealth gap and fleeing of intellectual and financial elite within developing countries, increased poverty, floods, monsoons, melting glaciers, tropical cyclones, hurricanes, water contamination, ecosystem destruction, political unrest throughout Asia and Europe, and even a full-scale war between China and Russia.

Education and understanding of the effects of global warming are critical, but sermons about an environmental apocalypse, while effective at rallying political support, ultimately monger fear, force a poor prioritization of resources, and threaten our ability to respond to more imminent threats. Each of the above disasters could happen, but the risks need to be balanced against other threats and priorities.

Climate change and its affect on national security have not exactly been ignored. As I mentioned, the Select Committee on Energy Independence has already held an identical hearing. There have been a slew of books and policy papers, several of which will be discussed today. And, most importantly, the intelligence community is already studying the issue. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence informed me that it expects to release a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on the issue in early 2008. Nonetheless, both the House and Senate are considering legislation that would force the Director of National Intelligence to submit the NIE that his office is already working on. Holding identical hearings and mandating reports that are already being written has more to do with politics than preparedness.

This is not the first time someone has claimed that “the sky is falling.” The predictions surrounding Y2K were similarly dire. Of course, this time is different. Every time the sky falls it is different, and every time, those who advocate common sense are chastised for ignoring the inescapable peril. Maybe it is my unwavering optimism that protects me from paranoia, or maybe it is just a lifetime of experience with dire

prognostications. As unwise as it would be for us to ignore the national security implications of climate change, it is equally unwise to politicize our security to a degree that we exaggerate certain threats and ignore others.

Environmental consequences are not the only problems we have to address in our response to global warming. The other side of this challenge, the side that politicians and green extremists are reluctant to acknowledge, is that our energy demands are rising and will continue to rise. Running out of conventional power plants is an actually imminent threat. We need to find solutions, like nuclear power, that limit or eliminate carbon emissions but also ensure that our energy needs will be met.

We are also facing unprecedented economic challenges. As the challenges of competing in a global economy mount, rapidly growing countries like China and India have made clear that they do not intend to hinder their economic growth to curb climate change. This means that any modest successes we enjoy at limiting our emissions will be completely offset by China and other nations. It also means that we cannot afford to stall our own economic development when other nations will not be similarly handicapped. Solutions that compromise our ability to produce energy or compete in a global economy will be disastrous for America's future.

Fostering a more robust economy is our strongest defense against climate change. As *The New York Times* published in an article titled "Feel Good vs. Do Good on Climate," "the weather matters a lot less than how people respond to it." Robert Davis, a climatologist at the University of Virginia, concluded that the number of heat-related deaths in New York in the 1990s was 33% lower than the number of deaths in the 1960s. It was not, of course, cooler in the 1990s than it was in the 1960s, but the increase in air conditioning was saving lives. Because it is too late to prevent global warming, the best response is to ensure that our economy is strong enough to adequately respond. Everyone agrees that the wealthiest countries and individuals will be the least affected by global warming.

It has become controversial in today's warming political climate, but it is not outrageous to trust that American ingenuity can respond to this challenge as it has responded to challenges in the past. Preparedness demands that we consider how changing circumstances affect the overall picture of our national security, but ultimately, solutions to global warming and the multitude of problems that it presents will be solved by the scientific community and the emerging technological industries. As policymakers, our focus should be on encouraging these industries, ensuring that our energy needs are met by sources that limit carbon emissions, and by responding to and anticipating problems engendered by climate change.

As our witnesses testify today, I hope they will focus their answers less on scare tactics and hypothetical cataclysms than on common sense approaches to dealing with the problems we are facing. After all, we know the sky isn't falling if only because hot air rises.