



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Assessing the Homeland Security Impacts of a Changing Climate

April 9, 2019

The very real and sad truth is that climate change is upon us. Unfortunately, under the Republican-controlled House, the nation lost eight years of Congressional oversight and planning for climate change.

As recently as 2015, members of this Committee were debating the value of the Federal government working to address climate change. We cannot afford to have years go by where Congress sits idly by as climate change produces more deadly and frequent natural disasters. A changing climate is a threat to U.S. infrastructure, agriculture, economy, healthcare, population, and so much more. This all makes it a clear and serious threat to our homeland security.

During the hyperactive 2017 hurricane season and unprecedented California wildfires, we bore witness to the unfortunate impacts of climate change. Hurricane Harvey, for example, was one of the most significant rain events in U.S. History. Through science, we know that the increased temperatures caused more rainfall, and subsequently this extreme rain event.

Science also helps us to understand that human behavior is the largest contributing factor to climate change. Therefore, it is incomprehensible that the Trump Administration continues to rollback regulations that help to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Instead of facing this problem head on, the Department of Homeland Security, as well as other agencies under Trump, refuse to even mention climate change, as if not mentioning it would make it go away. We cannot have DHS, who oversees FEMA, simply ignore a problem that is so critical to our homeland security.

We have reports from the Department of Defense, the Government Accountability Office, and even the Department of Homeland Security in previous administrations, that have recognized this threat. It will threaten our military bases and critical infrastructure, reduce our agricultural yields, and make the spread of disease more prevalent.

Another sad truth is that low-income communities will suffer compounded impacts of climate change. As a Hurricane Katrina survivor, I understand the toll one intense disaster can have on communities—especially low-income communities.

With it being already more difficult for low-income communities to recover from major disasters, it is unfathomable to imagine how these communities will deal with having intense disasters on a more regular basis. More frequent and extreme weather also puts an incredible strain on Federal resources; inhibiting response and recovery activities. We saw this unfold in Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria, where by the time the storm hit, Federal resources were stretched so thin that the island that suffered from a subpar response, contributing to an astonishing death toll of 3,000.

The Federal government is already incapable of adequately responding to the disasters we're seeing now, let alone as they get worse in future years. We cannot continue to allow climate change to intensify. We must do what we can to promote a cleaner environment that can be sustained for generations to come.

Investments today in mitigation, that will reduce the future damage of extreme weather events, is a smart down payment for our safety and security, and this administration should be working with Congress to make that happen.

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