



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

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Hearing Statement of Emergency Preparedness, Response, & Recovery Subcommittee Chairwoman Val Demings (D-FL)

Examining Climate Change: A Threat to the Homeland

June 8, 2021

We are here today to discuss climate change and our nation's response. Climate change is a major threat to our country.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's mission is to, and I quote, "secure the nation from the many threats we face," unquote. Therefore, the Department's mission includes taking actions to address the effects of climate change. Already, the impacts of climate change on communities across the country exact devastating human and financial costs; and if we fail to address the challenges posed by climate change those costs will only increase.

The science is in, climate change is happening, and it is increasing the severity and frequency of extreme weather events. According to NOAA, since 1980, the U.S. has sustained close to 300 weather and climate disasters, like catastrophic hurricanes, flooding, and wildfires, where overall financial damages reached or exceeded \$1 billion, and the total cost of these events now exceeds \$1.9 trillion. In 2020, for example, multiple extreme weather events, like Tropical Storm Eta and Hurricane Sally, to name only two, severely impacted my home state of Florida and the Southeastern U.S. region, and each storm, respectively, resulted in more than \$1 billion of financial damages for the U.S.

Last week, the Federal Reserve Chairman, Jerome Powell, acknowledged the serious risks the climate crises poses to the U.S. and global economy, stating, and I quote: "There is no doubt that climate change poses profound challenges for the global economy and certainly the financial system." Unquote. Since 2013, including in 2021, the U.S. Government Accountability Office included the Federal government's fiscal exposure to the risks of climate change in the Office's High-Risk List report.

To save lives, and to lower the Federal government's fiscal exposure to climate change, GAO stated, and I quote, "the federal government needs a cohesive, strategic approach with strong leadership and the authority to manage risks across the entire range of related federal activities," unquote. Reports released by both the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Department of Defense, characterize climate change as an urgent, growing threat based on its ability to cripple critical infrastructure, deplete military resources, and fuel terrorism.

Despite the pressing need to address the risks posed by climate change, and despite the progress that had been made by the Obama Administration, President Trump, disregarded these challenges, increased the likelihood that Americans would experience these risks, and took steps to eliminate Federal research and response climate change programs. In contrast, through multiple Executive Orders on the climate crisis, and by providing \$1 billion to communities through FEMA's Pre-Disaster Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities program, and through the Biden Administration's plan to invest in resilient critical infrastructure through the American Jobs Plan and the Administration's budget

proposal, President Biden continues to take swift and bold action to restore America's leadership on climate issues and confront the risks posed by climate change.

In preparing for and responding to the effects of climate change, DHS, FEMA, and the broader Federal government, must include conscious planning for racial and socioeconomic disparities. And that is why the Biden Administration is also taking action on environmental justice issues through the creation of the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council and other initiatives. Additionally, DHS Secretary Mayorkas has also taken steps to inform the Department's climate response programs to include the goals of advancing equity and increasing resilience for vulnerable and high-risk communities.

Responding to climate change will take a unified effort among Federal, State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial governments and private sector partners, and President Biden's leadership, along with the sustained focus by Members of this Subcommittee are essential to that effort. It is with sincere gratitude that I welcome our witnesses here today. Thank you for agreeing to share your insight with this Subcommittee and with the public. We look forward to your testimony.

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Media contact: Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978