



News From Congresswoman Hilda L. Solis The United States Congress

Solis: Moral Imperative to Protect Public Health from Climate Change Urges Administration to Declare Greenhouse Gasses an Endangerment to Public Health

Washington, D.C. —Congresswoman Hilda L. Solis (D-CA), a member of the Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming, released the following statement as prepared for delivery at today’s Select Committee hearing titled, “Healthy Planet, Healthy People: Global Warming and Public Health.”

“Good morning, and thank you to our witnesses for joining us today. I know we all wish Chairman Markey a speedy recovery and a quick return to work.

“This week, both National Public Health Week and World Health Day are focusing on the impact climate change will have on the health of our communities. Today’s hearing is an opportunity to address this important relationship.

“The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that the effects of climate change may have caused over 150,000 deaths in 2000, and predicts that these impacts are likely to increase in the future. According to the IPCC, the United States will be challenged by increased heat waves, air pollution, and forest fires during the course of the century, with potential risk for adverse health impacts, such as heat stress and increases in asthma, allergies, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

“Last October, the Director of the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Julie Gerberding, testified that, ‘Climate change is anticipated to have a broad range of impacts on the health of Americans and the nation’s public health infrastructure.’ The World Health Organization found that the negative public health impacts of climate change will likely disproportionately impact communities that are already vulnerable.

“Children, the elderly, the poor and communities of color are most vulnerable to the negative health impacts of climate change. More than fifty percent of the 39 million people in the U.S. who are impoverished live in urban areas. The majority of these are communities of color. In its recent report, the IPCC noted that these communities will have less capacity to deal with effects of climate change.

“Many of these communities are already suffering from cumulative exposures. 5.5 million Latinos and 68 percent of all African Americans live within the range where

health impacts from power plants are the most severe, and more than 70 percent of African Americans and Latinos live in counties that violate federal air pollution standards.

“EPA first recognized the possible impacts of climate change on public health over a decade ago. In a 1997 EPA publication titled ‘Climate Change and Public Health,’ the EPA wrote that ‘as the climate changes, natural systems will be destabilized, which could pose a number of risks to human health.’ In 2001, the EPA sponsored a report for the Global Change Research Program titled, ‘Climate Change and Human Health; the Potential Consequences of Climate Variability and Change.’ This report stated that the assessment ‘makes clear that the potential health impacts are diverse and demand improved health infrastructure and enhanced, targeted research.’

“As policymakers, we have a moral imperative to make sure that policy and regulations protect our most vulnerable communities.

“Unfortunately, the health and welfare of minority and low-income communities continues to be put at risk by the Administration’s failure to develop, implement, and enforce environmental regulations, including the regulation of greenhouse gases. This Administration is doing more than a disservice by not acknowledging that greenhouse gas emissions cause or contribute to air pollution which may endanger public health – it is unnecessarily risking public health.

“Hurricane Katrina demonstrated to the world the direct effects that climate change is having on the health of our most vulnerable communities. These outcomes will worsen with inaction.

“The Administration must make a determination that carbon dioxide emissions be declared an endangerment to human health. And we must recognize our role in preventing the impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities, including the need to improve health status and health equity, the inclusion of health policy in the development of climate response, and the need to prevent injustices such as those that resulted from Hurricane Katrina.

“I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about their perspectives on the actions that the government should be taking regarding energy and climate change to protect our nation’s most vulnerable communities.

“I yield back the balance of my time.”