



**THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY INDEPENDENCE AND GLOBAL WARMING**

**Opening Statement for Chairman Edward Markey
Global Warming effects on Extreme Weather
Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming
July 10, 2008**

Global warming is a tale of extremes.

It is not enough water. It is too much water.
It is Californians battling to protect their homes from drought-fuelled wildfires.
It is Midwest communities sandbagging levees to hold back the flood waters.
It is public health officials protecting the elderly from dangerous heat waves.
It is water utilities trying to provide drinking water for a growing population.
It is farmers trying to cope with not enough water, or much too much.

Certainly floods, droughts and heat waves have always occurred. But by loading up the atmosphere with global warming pollution, we are loading Mother Nature's dice for more extreme weather.

As global warming pollution increases, we are rewriting the book on the planet's weather and climate. In the latest eye-opening reports from the United States Climate Change Science Program, scientists are predicting increases in heat waves, extreme rain, and drought, and if we do nothing to change the course of these events we may not like the way this story ends.

Thankfully, this story is not finished. We can still choose how it ends. We must take action now to protect the most vulnerable among us from these extreme weather events. And there are solutions. Today we will hear from a panel of experts who understand the extreme weather challenges our nation will face, but are also actively working towards solutions to those challenges. Their testimony today will guide us towards a path of increasing our resilience to extreme weather.

But we cannot simply treat the symptoms and fail to address the underlying sickness. As we increase our nation's resilience to extreme weather, we must also dramatically reduce our global warming pollution. Even with the best preparation, we have too many examples that point to our limited ability to cope with extreme weather. We need to look no further than the reoccurring annual death toll from heat waves. Or to the wildfires that burn millions of acres every year in the West. Or to the cities that struggle to provide water for their growing populations, for their agriculture, or their hydroelectric power production. At the same time extreme precipitation has caused the current devastation in the Midwest.

Perhaps no weather disaster highlights our weakness to climate challenges than our inadequate response to Katrina, which still haunts us several years later. Today, we have several students in the room who have seen the devastation of extreme weather, and our nation's failure to cope with this devastation, first hand. These participants in the Southeast Climate Witness Program were all displaced by Hurricane Katrina and are now studying the vulnerability of their regions to future storms and climate change. We thank them for their work and for coming today. They illustrate that climate change is not just an environmental or economic issue, but it has impacts on real people and their communities.

Global warming will push weather outside the range of what we used to know as normal. This also means that old methods of weather protection will no longer be sufficient to meet the climate challenges of the future. We must protect society's most vulnerable people from the impacts we can no longer avoid, while reducing global warming pollution to avoid a climate crisis. It is time for this Congress to write climate legislation that will ensure that the next chapter of our story is one that protects people and the planet.