

Chairman Dingell at the Subcommittee on Energy and Air Quality hearing entitled, "Climate Change: Are Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Human Activities Contributing to a Warming of the Planet"

Statement of Congressman John D. Dingell, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND AIR QUALITY
HEARING ENTITLED "CLIMATE CHANGE: ARE GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS FROM HUMAN ACTIVITIES CONTRIBUTING TO A WARMING OF THE PLANET"
March 7, 2007

Thank you Mr. Chairman and thank you for calling this series of hearings on climate change.

Today we examine the scientific question of whether greenhouse gas emissions from human activities are contributing, and will continue to contribute, to a warming of the planet. While many of us have had significant doubts on this question in the past, as we meet today it seems to me that the science on this question has been settled.

The extent of scientific consensus on this matter is well-reflected by the recently published findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which just released the "Summary for Policymakers" for its 4th Assessment Report. The report was produced by some 600 authors from 40 countries. Over 620 expert reviewers and a large number of government reviewers also participated. Representatives from 113 governments (including the United States) reviewed and revised the Summary line-by-line before adopting it and accepting the underlying report.

The IPCC found that "warming of the climate system is unequivocal" and that "most of the observed increase in globally averaged temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions." By very likely the IPCC means a 9 in 10 chance. For the future, the IPCC found that "change in the global climate system in the 21st century . . . would very likely be larger than those observed during the 20th century."

Indeed, even the Administration seems to be in agreement on this point. Right after the IPCC report was released, Secretary of Energy Samuel Bodman was reported as saying that "We're very pleased with it. We're embracing it. We agree with it." He went on to add that "Human activity is contributing to changes in our Earth's climate and that issue is no longer up for debate."

Last month I had a fascinating discussion with some of the scientists responsible for the IPCC report. I asked some very detailed questions, some technical and some quite challenging. The answers I received were forthright. They explained that they have looked at changes in solar radiation, volcanic eruptions, urban heat islands, and many other phenomenon that are contributing to climate change. They explained that some of these factors are important for local temperature, but that the only explanation for the large increase in global temperatures are the greenhouse gases we are adding to the atmosphere.

The scientists explained that there are some areas where scientific uncertainty exists. On the central question of man's

contribution to the increase in global temperature due to greenhouse gas emissions, however, the evidence is clear.

It is important for the Committee to probe renowned scientists to better understand what the science is telling us and how certain we are about the answers to different questions. We need to find out where the science gives us clear answers and where the science gives us fuzzy answers.

Today we are focusing on the threshold question of the extent to which greenhouse gas emissions from human activities are causing an increase in global temperature. At a future hearing, we will explore the consequences of global warming for the Earth's systems -- in other words, we will be asking why it matters that we are increasing global temperatures.

In closing Mr. Chairman I hope that members will use this opportunity to ask the tough questions and to seek answers for any uncertainty they may have about the science of climate change.

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