

Statement of Ranking Member Bonnie Watson Coleman

Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency

Hearing: “Examining DHS’s Misplaced Focus on Climate Change”

July 8, 2015

I appreciate the opportunity to include Democratic Members’ concerns with this hearing. The title of this hearing presumes that Department of Homeland Security programs and DHS coordination by the Executive Office of the President demonstrates a “misplaced focus” on security risks linked to climate-change. Chairman McCaul’s May 20th statement belittles these necessary efforts as “climate politics.” I strongly disagree with that assessment.

The DHS FY 2016 budget request includes several important activities designated as responses to climate change, among other purposes, such as hazard mapping and risk analysis to support the National Flood Insurance Program, planning and implementation of physical measures to avoid or reduce damage associated with natural disasters, critical infrastructure assessments, and DHS state, local, and tribal workshops to build their capacity, inform preparedness activities, and validate their capabilities.

I recognize that today’s hearing will probably not lead you and I to agree on sources or implications of carbon released into our atmosphere by human activity. Nonetheless, to me it is essential for DHS to pursue activities like those I described earlier, regardless of the Department’s views on the sources of climate change.

In fact, last year our colleagues in the Senate Homeland Security Committee held a hearing titled “Extreme Weather Events—The Cost of Not Being Prepared.” At that hearing, Senator Johnson—who now chairs that Committee—described lack of investment in disaster mitigation as “penny-wise and pound-foolish”.

Mr. Chairman, we cannot afford to be pennywise and pound foolish when it comes to disaster mitigation. Events from New Jersey to the Gulf Coast have required the deployment of DHS capabilities ranging from search-and-rescue, to humanitarian relief, to law-enforcement assistance. Neither my constituents, nor yours will soon forget the devastation Hurricane Sandy, which caused \$67 billion in damages.

Beyond just weather and climate events, Mr. Chairman, social-scientists—including some within the U.S. Intelligence Community—have indicated that weather changes across the globe play a role in dislocating populations, intensifying violent conflict and crime, promoting disease transmission, and aggravating economic and social stresses that destabilize governments. These factors leave populations more vulnerable to incitement by extremist elements, and are squarely in the purview of the Department’s most vital duties.

At the publication last month of the Pope Francis’ encyclical letter *On Care for Our Common Home*, my Democratic colleague on the Committee, Mr. Langevin of Rhode Island, noted the emphasis on “the disproportionate impacts that climate change will have on the world’s poor and those living in developing countries.” Indeed, in the letter the Pope noted “it is foreseeable that, once certain resources have been depleted, the scene will be set for new wars.” Pope Francis adds that “the control of water...may become a major source of conflict in this century,” and he notes “the premature death of many of the poor, in conflicts sparked by the shortage of resources.”

I welcome the testimony today from our distinguished witnesses. I look forward to testimony by Acting DHS Assistant Secretary Smith, FEMA Deputy Associate Administrator Wright, and DHS Deputy Assistant Secretary Kolasky to clarify for us how climate-designated spending in the Department’s budget will work to avert or reduce the effects of future storms like Hurricanes Sandy—which is a very important area of focus for me and my community.

I also welcome testimony from Professor Levy, who has assessed the national-security implications of climate shifts for the National Intelligence Council –and who advises the World Economic Forum, established to foster cooperation between business and government leaders to address critical global problems.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I know that many residents of your district acutely suffered in the events of September 11, 2001—an attack that also took the lives of 48 people from my own District. I have no doubt that we will not—and should not—compete in our dedication to confront and disrupt violent extremism. I am confident that we share the commitment to mitigate each of the conditions which allow violent extremism to develop.

I support the interest my colleagues in the Majority have demonstrated to countering violent extremism wherever it rears its head. I look forward to the Committee acting favorably on Ranking Member Thompson’s letter to Chairman McCaul, requesting that the Committee hold hearings to address threats to homeland security from domestic terrorism, such as the shooting at Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, and several suspicious church fires.

In closing, I hope that this hearing will prove a fair discussion of the wide range of security risks posed by climate phenomena, rather than an opportunity play politics or otherwise misplace the focus of Congressional oversight.