

Rep. Schakowsky  
Opening Statement  
Energy and Commerce Committee  
Markup – H.R. 3826 and H.R. 2126  
January 27, 2014

The ten hottest years on earth since 1880 have all occurred since 1997. This time last year, we had just completed the hottest year ever in the United States, a full degree hotter (in terms of average temperature) than the previous record. Last year was the fourth-hottest in history. Now, in 2014, we are dealing with record cold. My hometown of Chicago has closed schools today and will again tomorrow – with wind chill temperatures more than 30 degrees below zero. Already, this is the third-snowiest winter on record in Chicago. This extreme weather is a clear sign.

There is no question that climate change is real and that it is man-made. Large multinational corporations have joined environmentalists, scientists, and the vast majority of the American public who recognize the impact of carbon pollution on our world. Coca-Cola has already suffered from a global water shortage that is driving up costs and has recognized climate change as a challenge to its future profitability. ExxonMobil and the other Big 5 oil companies are assuming that the federal government will hold them accountable for the cost of carbon pollution in the future. Climate change also played a central role in discussions at the World Economic Forum last week in Davos, Switzerland – a gathering of the world's leading executives and economic thinkers.

We face serious danger. Over the next few centuries, sea levels could rise an average of 12 feet, swallowing coastal areas in the U.S. and around the world. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, drought and famine could lead to decreased water availability, increased starvation, and new instability in many regions of the world – particularly Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America.

We have an opportunity to act, and while one of the bills we will consider tomorrow puts us on the right path, the other would cripple meaningful efforts to curb carbon pollution.

I strongly support the McKinley-Welch legislation, which would incentivize energy efficiency at federal buildings. It is the kind of realistic approach we need more of around here.

At the same time, I adamantly oppose the Electricity Security and Affordability Act, which would prevent meaningful emissions reductions at coal-fired power plants – the largest emitters of carbon dioxide in this country. We cannot address climate change without pursuing cleaner technologies and energy alternatives that will both drive our economy and improve public health in the future.

We should be taking steps forward, not backward. I ask my colleagues to consider the legacy they'll leave. Will you be proud to say that you supported undermining meaningful action to combat climate change in the face of consensus that something should be done?