

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS
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House of Representatives
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Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
Markup of H.R. 3826, the Electricity Security and Affordability Act
Subcommittee on Energy and Power
January 13, 2014

Mr. Chairman, this is the first time this Subcommittee has met for business this year. And it should be a time for new beginnings and new approaches, a time to work together on trying to figure out what to do with our energy and environmental problems in this nation.

Instead, the House Republicans are starting in 2014 right where they left off in 2013. They are denying the science of climate change, ignoring the risks, and trying to stop the Environmental Protection Agency from protecting the American people from carbon pollution.

The bill before us today would amend the Clean Air Act to block any limits on carbon pollution from coal-fired power plants, which happens to be the largest source of carbon pollution in the United States. This is a recipe for climate disaster.

Events over the past few weeks have further underscored the costs of climate change. We see it; we hear about it almost daily. When you disrupt the climate system of the planet, heat, droughts, and storms are the impacts that we see.

In my own state of California, we're facing devastating and intensifying drought. Last year was the driest year on record in California. Los Angeles experienced its driest year since they started keeping records in 1877. San Francisco also broke previous records, which extend back to 1849. UCLA modeling suggests that these rainfall levels may well become the new normal by mid-century.

Now in our third year of drought, California's reservoirs are depleted and the costs are mounting. The water shortage is fallowing farmlands, destroying salmon populations, hurting ski resorts, and requiring mandatory rationing in some cities.

These are just some of the things we're seeing by way of costs in terms of climate heating up. But the costs of climate disruption are going to get worse, much worse, if we don't act now to cut carbon pollution.

So at the hearing on this bill last November, I turned to the Republicans and I said, “What’s your plan for dealing with climate change?” We haven’t heard anything. We have no alternative. I’m still waiting for an answer.

The House Republicans’ solution is . . . nothing. Their approach is to deny the problem, try to stop EPA action, and to weaken the Clean Air Act. The bill before us today will effectively repeal EPA’s existing authority to address carbon pollution from power plants under the Clean Air Act.

We’ll hear that EPA must be stopped or it will be the end of coal. Well that’s absolute nonsense. We use lots of coal today and we will continue to use lots of coal for some time to come. EPA’s rules will require that new coal-fired power plants to use technology – technology that you can go out and buy today – to control carbon pollution. I don’t think that’s too much to ask.

And EPA hasn’t even issued a proposal for reducing carbon pollution from existing power plants. But before they issue a proposal, our Committee Republicans – I hope not unanimously because you all don’t come from coal areas – would take away the jurisdiction to even issue a proposal. Let’s just stop them from making any proposals. The agency is currently undertaking an impressive outreach effort to gather stakeholder views even before the formal notice and comment process. Why don’t we see what the agency comes up with before declaring we will block it?

My message to my Republican colleagues is simple: If you don’t like what EPA is doing, tell us what your plan is. Last year, the President asked Congress to work with him on a legislative solution to climate change. But he also said if you don’t act, if you have no proposals step aside. The president is going to lead.

Denying or ignoring the science is not a responsible way to govern. Passing the bill before us today is not a responsible way to act. It will only jeopardize the future for our children and grandchildren. Don’t be so myopic that you look only at the coal industry in your district and play to the cheap seats and tell them how you’re saving them from the war on coal. There is no war on coal. But there is a problem, and we’ve got to solve the problem, not deny it.