The Obama Administration's Climate Change Policies and Activities

Witnesses:
Hon. Gina McCarthy
Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Hon. Ernest Moniz
Secretary, U.S. Department of Energy

Committee Members Present:
Ed Whitfield (R-KY) Subcommittee Chairman
Fred Upton (R-MI), Full Committee Chairman
Steve Scalise (R-LA) Subcommittee Vice Chair
Henry Waxman (D-CA) Subcommittee Ranking Member
Tim Murphy (R-PA) Committee Chairman
Bob Inglis (R-SC)
Gene Green (D-TX)
David McKinley (R-WV)
Lois Capps (D-CA)

On Wednesday, September 18th, the House Committee on Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Environment and Commerce Subcommittee on Environment and Commerce held a hearing to assess the Obama Administration's new Climate Change Action Plan. The committee invited thirteen federal agencies to testify, but only two agencies attended: Administrator Gina McCarthy represented the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Secretary Ernest Moniz spoke for the Department of Energy. The purpose of the hearing was to address Federal agencies' role in the Climate Change Action Plan.

In June, President Obama announced a Climate Action Plan to reduce carbon pollution in America, to prepare the country for the impacts of climate change, and to become an international leader to combat climate change. In compliance with the Climate Action Plan, the EPA proposed Carbon Pollution Standards on Sept. 20 to cut carbon pollution from new power plants to improve public health and curb climate change. This hearing marked the first time since President Obama unveiled his Climate Action Plan that administration officials testified on Capitol Hill regarding the agenda.

Secretary Moniz, a former MIT scientist, spent much of his opening remarks summarizing climate change science. Both McCarthy and Moniz emphasized the need for Congress to collaborate with relevant federal agencies, as well as to work internationally with other governments and the private sector to efficiently address climate change. Democratic members on the subcommittee, Secretary Moniz, and Administrator McCarthy emphasized the importance in investing in clean and renewable energy technology. Opponents of the Climate Action Plan focused on their concerns about increased energy costs and the loss of domestic jobs due to the proposed regulations from EPA for new and existing power plants. David McKinley (R-WV) agreed CO2 levels are rising but denied a rise in temperature. Whereas Henry Waxman (D-CA) noted that the statements from Rep. McKinley were inaccurate and further emphasized the need for a committee of scientists to address the issues of climate change. Donna Christensen (D-Virgin Islands) urged critics of Obama’s Climate Policy to come up with their own plan and expressed that President Obama welcomed comments on his plan.

Jan Shakowsky (D-IL) asked the witnesses to address the issue of coal. McCarthy told members of the subcommittee that there is a future for coal, but it is a different future than expected: instead, there will be stricter regulations to limit emissions from coal-fired plants. In a memo sent by the EPA, they call the rule the “first uniform national limits on the amount of carbon pollution that future power plants will be allowed to emit. The proposed standards are in line with investments in clean energy technologies that are already being made in the power sector.” Lee Terry (R-NE) asked McCarthy if the EPA had the legal authority to eliminate coal as a fuel for new electrical generation. McCarthy responded that the EPA has the authority to establish standards for new plants and they are moving in a legally sound direction. McCarthy stated she believes coal will continue to provide a significant portion of the energy supply.

Members and witnesses agreed they need to continue the dialogue on how to address climate change with more federal agencies. Committee members said they will be in contact with other agencies not present at the hearing.

Opening statements, witness testimonies and an archived webcast of the hearing can be found on the Committee web site.