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House Democrats held a series of hearings throughout this month to highlight the scientific evidence and impacts of climate change. Beginning on February 6, both the House Natural Resources Committee and the Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change held simultaneous hearings on the societal impacts of climate change and the potential adaptation and mitigation strategies for policymakers to help address the issue.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva launched the Natural Resources Committee hearing with a call for action, emphasizing that “climate change is real... Every day we fail to act increases the costs of addressing this crisis for future generations.” The relatively large panel of nine witnesses at this hearing relayed a conclusive agreement: climate change is a pressing issue and needs to be addressed. Massachusetts Governor Charles D. Baker, one of the witnesses on the panel, noted that “in Massachusetts climate change is not a partisan issue – while there may sometimes be disagreement on specific policies, we understand the science and we know the impacts are real.”

At the Energy and Commerce Subcommittee hearing, Chairman Frank Pallone stated that the purpose of dedicating his committee’s first hearing to climate issues was because “we are feeling its effects now, and the influence of unchecked climate change is becoming more obvious every year.” Throughout the hearing, witnesses promoted the economic benefits of combatting climate change. Michael Williams, deputy director of the BlueGreen Alliance, said that “Americans don’t have to choose between a good job and a clean environment—or a safe climate—we can and must have both.” Williams touted the Buy Clean California Act, a state incentive program that became law in 2017, as an example of how the government can help to support jobs as well as a healthy environment by creating additional motivation for manufacturing suppliers to reduce their carbon emissions.

The following week, the Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources also held a climate-related hearing about preparing for the energy transition, and the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee held another hearing on the state of climate science.

As lawmakers pushed for action on the contentious Green New Deal proposal in the House (H. Res. 109), these climate hearings played out as a strategic move by Democrats to press for more vigorous action on climate change. The Green New Deal resolution, sponsored by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY-14), proposes an ambitious approach to dealing with climate change through a 10-year national mobilization effort. Critics emphasize the vagueness of the resolution, and Dr. Joseph R. Mason from Louisiana State University testified at the Natural Resources Subcommittee hearing that it neglects the increased concentration of pollutants other than carbon dioxide, referring to toxic materials such as heavy metal elements that are released into the atmosphere from rechargeable battery production.

The House continued to showcase its focus on climate change with six committees holding additional hearings during the last week of February.

Sources: Library of Congress; U.S. Green Building Council, Los Angeles Chapter; U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Energy and Commerce, Committee on Natural Resources, Committee on Science, Space, and Technology.
