

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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July 20, 2011

The Honorable Steven Chu
Secretary
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing to urge you to lead a national campaign to educate the public about the causes and dangers of climate change.

The scientific consensus linking carbon emissions to climate change has never been stronger. In May, the National Academy of Sciences, our nation's preeminent scientific organization, called for urgent action to reduce carbon emissions because "climate change is occurring, is very likely caused primarily by human activities, and poses significant risks to humans and the environment." In the same month, the top scientists at the Vatican called "on people and nations to recognize the serious and potentially irreversible impacts of global warming caused by the anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases." The national academies of science in every major nation have reached the same conclusion, as have virtually all of the world's climate scientists.

In fact, many scientists now believe that we are beginning to experience the consequences of climate change. They say that the heat waves, droughts, fires, and floods that are afflicting our nation are harbingers of the dangers we face if we continue to ignore the threat of climate change.

Yet at the same time that the scientific evidence has grown stronger and extreme weather has become more frequent and intense, the public's understanding of the danger has been diminishing. According to data from the Yale Project on Climate Change Communication, there has been a decline in the percentage of Americans who think climate change is occurring (from 71% in 2008 to 64% in 2011), a decline in the percentage of Americans who believe climate change is caused by man (from 57% in 2008 to 47% in 2011), and a decline in the percentage of Americans who are worried about climate change (from 63% in 2008 to 52% in 2011). There

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has even been a noticeable drop in the percentage of Americans who understand that there is a scientific consensus that climate change is happening (from 47% in 2008 and 39% in 2011).

There are powerful vested interests in the oil and coal industries successfully fanning disbelief in the science of climate change. In a recent article, former Vice President Al Gore likened their actions to the efforts of the tobacco companies to sow doubt about the dangers of smoking. We urgently need champions in the Administration to tell the American public the truth about the risks we face.

Your position as Secretary of Energy and your world-renowned stature as a scientist mean you are in a unique position to speak with authority about the science of climate change and the frightening consequences of inaction. Given the stakes, I believe you have a responsibility to do so. Your voice could make an enormous difference in ensuring our nation understands the magnitude of the risks and the urgent need for a plan of action.

I recognize that there are many competing demands on your time, but few, if any, could be as important. I ask you to investigate the disconnect that appears to be growing between the scientific and the public understanding of climate change. I hope you will then decide to lead a national effort to ensure the public is fully and accurately informed about the science of climate change and its implications for human health and welfare.

Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member

cc: The Honorable Fred Upton
Chairman