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U.S. SENATE CLIMATE CHANGE TASK FORCE

United States Senate

May 29, 2019

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Dr. Kelvin Droegemeier
Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy
Executive Office of the President
Eisenhower Executive Office Building
1650 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20504

Dear Dr. Droegemeier,

I write with concern that Trump administration officials have expressed an intent to interfere with the climate science and modeling done by our federal agencies, including modeling that is part of the foundation of the National Climate Assessment, a federally mandated scientific report on climate change impacts to the United States.

Climate change is already occurring, and its effects are being felt in the United States and around the globe. Under the Global Change Research Act of 1990, which President George H.W. Bush signed into law, the federal government must — no less frequently than every four years — prepare a scientific assessment of the effects of climate change on the natural environment, agriculture, energy production and use, land and water resources, transportation, human health and welfare, social systems, and biological diversity. According to the law, the National Climate Assessment must include a projection of climate change trends over the next 25 to 100 years.¹

The National Climate Assessment is an authoritative source on the impacts of climate change on the United States. Using state-of-the-art climate science and modeling, the latest volume — the Fourth National Climate Assessment — concludes that, if emissions continue unabated, by the end of the century extreme temperatures could end up costing the United States hundreds of billions in lost wages annually, and could harm the health of construction, agricultural and other outdoor workers.² Climate change could, without changes to current policy, cause up to nine degrees of warming globally³ and eleven feet of sea level rise in the northeastern United States⁴ by the end of this century. Further, the National Climate Assessment found that reducing greenhouse gas emissions will, by the end of the century, potentially save thousands of lives annually, and generate hundreds of billions of dollars of health-related economic benefits as compared to a high emissions scenario.⁵

¹ U.S. Global Change Research Program: Legal Mandate. <https://www.globalchange.gov/about/legal-mandate>.

² <https://climatenexus.org/climate-change-news/4th-u-s-national-climate-assessment-v2-main-messages/>.

³ National Climate Assessment, Volume II, Chapter 2: Our Changing Climate. <https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/chapter/2/>.

⁴ National Climate Assessment, Volume II, Chapter 18: Northeast. <https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/chapter/18/>.

⁵ Climate Nexus. 4th National Climate Assessment Vol. II: Main Messages. <https://climatenexus.org/climate-change-news/4th-u-s-national-climate-assessment-v2-main-messages/>.

This week, the *New York Times* reported that the Trump administration is moving to exclude worst-case scenario projections from future assessments. When asked about proposed changes, a spokesperson for the Environmental Protection Agency cited “inaccurate modeling that focuses on worst-case emissions scenarios” and claimed the assessment “does not reflect real-world conditions.”⁶ But according to the latest National Climate Assessment, the administration’s so-called worst-case scenario is most consistent with recent historical business-as-usual emissions: “The observed acceleration in carbon emissions over the past 15–20 years is consistent with the higher future scenarios (such as [the highest emission scenario considered in the assessment, referred to as] RCP8.5).”⁷ To exclude a similarly high-emission scenario from future assessments would willfully neglect the consequences of our current emissions trajectories. This would artificially and unjustifiably understate the risks that climate change presents to the United States, and would misinform federal and state action taken in response to this threat.

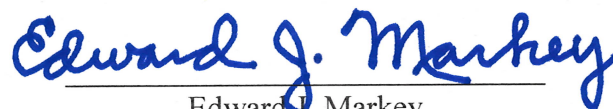
Political interference cannot be permitted to stifle work on climate change by our scientists. Any political interference into the climate science that underpins this report could have a chilling effect on scientific research going forward and could potentially put American lives and property at increased risk by understating the urgency of climate action.

Given the stakes, I request answers to the following questions by no later than June 15, 2019:

- Who is responsible for making the proposed decision to exclude worst-case scenario modeling from the National Climate Assessment? Please identify all agencies that were consulted regarding this proposed change.
- What is the scientific basis of criticisms levied by administration officials against the current worst-case scenarios, including those set forth in the second volume of the Fourth National Climate Assessment? Please explain what methods or assumptions you believe to be “inaccurate” and why.
- Please identify any outside organizations that have been consulted in considering a change to the existing scope and scenarios included in the National Climate Assessments. What are their qualifications for consideration of this topic?
- Will you commit to directing the heads of all agencies contributing to the National Climate Assessment to follow the recommendations of scientific authors on which scenarios to include in it? If not, why not?

It is imperative that nothing, especially politically motivated interference, prevents policymakers and the American people from receiving science-based assessments on climate change and its impacts — assessments that include all scenarios. As your administration prepares this congressionally mandated report on climate change, I urge you to ensure that there is no interference or suppression of science.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

⁶ Coral Davenport and Mark Landler, *Trump Administration Hardens Its Attack on Climate Science*, N.Y. Times (May 27, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/27/us/politics/trump-climate-science.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share>.

⁷ National Climate Assessment, Volume II, Chapter 2: Our Changing Climate. <https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/chapter/2/>.