

Paris talks 'not going to impact' climate change, climate scientist says

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A Cato Institute climate scientist told a House committee Wednesday the climate change talks in Paris at the end of the month won't change our climate's current path.

Paul Knappenberger, the assistant director for the Center for the Study of Science at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, told the House Science, Space and Technology Committee that the plans for reducing greenhouse gas emissions put forth by countries attending the talks are going to be close to the status quo.

"It's not going to impact the direction the climate is going to go in the future, although I believe there will be some economic impact," Knappenberger said. "But, again, many countries are not pledging much more than business as usual anyway."

The United Nations Conference on Climate Change is scheduled to start Nov. 30 and run through Dec. 11.

Analysis of the plans set forth by many of the countries attending the conference show the plans would limit the rate of global warming to 2.7 degrees Celsius. While that's an improvement, it's above the 2 degrees Celsius increase many scientists believe can't be breached to stop the many predicted disastrous effects of climate change.

The hearing, titled "The Administration's Empty Promises for the International Climate Treaty," mostly focused on criticisms of the Clean Power Plan. The regulation is the key part of the U.S. plan for the Paris talks.

Chairman Lamar Smith, R-Texas, said the plan itself is a political ploy that won't do enough to stop climate change, the existence of which Smith doubts. He said the links between extreme weather and global warming are unfounded and reiterated his belief that government scientists manipulated historical data to prove global warming.

"The American people should be suspicious of the motives of the administration as it continually impedes congressional oversight of agency actions tied to its extreme climate agenda," Smith said.

Many of the Republicans on the committee said the Clean Power Plan, which requires states to cut greenhouse gas emissions by one-third by 2030, would end up costing electricity ratepayers more than it would help them with health benefits.

Rep. Bill Posey, R-Fla., said no matter how much the United States limits its fossil fuel use, developing countries in other parts of the world will continue to burn coal for power as they expand. He pointed to India and China as examples of countries that will expand their coal use in the coming decades while the United States tries to limit its emissions. Many climate scientists blame the greenhouse gases emitted from the burning of fossil fuels for driving manmade climate change.

Posey accused President Obama and his administration of being cold to low-income families who would have to pay more to keep their lights on or heat their homes.

"It's just not reality and it's hard to understand why they seem to have no problem making life more difficult for American families," he said, "and especially making life more difficult for those in America and around the world who can least afford it. I just don't understand why they want to harm them."

Rep. Gary Palmer, R-Ala., said Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Gina McCarthy admitted the point of the Clean Power Plan is to encourage other nations to limit their emissions and to strengthen the U.S. bargaining position in Paris.

"It seems like it's a massive public relations program. It really seems like it's a political program," he said.

Rep. Donna Edwards, D-Md., dismissed the idea that the Clean Power Plan won't have a real impact on global emissions.

She pointed to the United States' position as the world's second-biggest carbon emitter and argued that emission cuts from the United States would have a large impact on the effects of climate change.

"If we were just to go to the 2025 levels with the reduction targets set in place we would reduce our carbon emissions by about 20 percent. If we were to go out to the 2050 time frame we would reduce their emissions about 60 percent," Edwards said. "This would have a measurable impact on temperatures and climate change."

No member of the Obama administration or EPA testified at Wednesday's hearing.