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FINANCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND  
COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITY

SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND  
CONSUMER CREDIT

SELECT COMMITTEE ON  
ENERGY INDEPENDENCE AND  
GLOBAL WARMING

Regional Whip (Region 4)

Robert Wagner  
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Emanuel Cleaver, II

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Dear Robert:

Thank you for contacting me regarding climate change. I appreciate hearing from you on this important issue.

Science indicates that the Earth's global temperature is very close to the warmest experienced since human civilization began to flourish 12,000 years ago. Nearly all climate change scientists have found that the Earth's temperature is changing, having warmed by 1.1 to 1.5 degrees Fahrenheit since the Industrial Revolution. Additionally, most climate scientists have agreed that humans have caused a large part of the change in climate, especially since the 1970s. This variation has been accredited to the effects of elevated greenhouse gas concentrations resulting from fossil fuel use, industrial and agricultural emissions, and land clearing. Concentrations of carbon dioxide have risen by more than one-third in the past 150 years, from about 280 parts per million (ppm) to about 380 ppm. Of the total net greenhouse gas emission worldwide, the United States contributes almost one-fifth, surpassing any other country in the world.

In January 2007, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its fourth annual comprehensive report on these changes. The report states that global atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide have increased sharply as a result of human activities since 1750. These concentrations now far exceed pre-industrial values detected from ice cores spanning thousands of years. Global increases in carbon dioxide concentration are caused primarily by fossil fuel use and land-use change. Increases in concentrations of methane and nitrous oxide are largely due to agricultural activities. The IPCC report found that 11 of the last 12 years (1995-2006) rank among the 12 warmest years recorded for global surface temperature. The IPCC report states observations since 1961 have shown that the average temperature of the global ocean has increased. Warming of the ocean caused seawater to expand, contributing to sea level rise. In conclusion, the scientists state in the report that global warming was "very likely" caused by human activity. This translates into a more than 90% certainty that the changes in climate are a result of unnatural causes, most notably the burning of fossil fuels. This is the strongest conclusion to date concerning the sources of climate change, making it nearly impossible to claim that natural forces are to blame.