

Legislation Directs EPA to Examine Impacts of Climate Change on Water Resources

Washington, DC - U.S. Reps. John Hall (D-NY) and Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today introduced legislation that will help protect America's water from climate change. The legislation would direct the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and National Academies of Science (NAS) to study the impact of climate change on America's water resources.

"America's waters are the lifeblood of our nation, and our most fundamental resource," said Hall. "The status of these waters has direct bearing on public health, agricultural production, and national prosperity. In light of the critical role that water resources play in our daily lives, it is imperative that we take action to understand how they will be impacted by the forces of climate change."

Hinchey said, "Clean water is critical to any civilized society. Fortunately, access to clean drinking water is currently not a widespread problem in the United States like it is in other countries around the world. However, prominent scientists such as James Hansen have warned us that America's water supply is at risk due to the impact of global warming. A comprehensive study by the EPA and National Academies of Science will help determine the array of potential consequences that the warming of our planet will have on both our water quality and quantity and then serve as a guide for governing bodies to take preventative action."

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Nobel Peace Prize winning scientific body established to provide comprehensive and objective information about climate change, has concluded that climate change is occurring and exerting pressure on global water resources. The IPCC has further stated that freshwater resources are among the most vulnerable to climate change. A study conducted by researchers at Ohio State University found that rising sea levels could result in a loss of over more than half of the fresh water supplies available for coastal communities as a result of flooding and saltwater intrusion. Dr. James Hansen, the top climate scientist at NASA, says that climate change induced water shortages in the western United States would possibly "render the semi-arid states from west and central Texas through Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas drought prone and unsuitable for agriculture." According to the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies, intensifying rainfall

and flooding will result in more severe pollution from overwhelmed wastewater treatment systems, leading to public health threats.

"Growing evidence shows that we cannot afford to take clean drinking water for granted," said Hall. "Action is needed to better understand and react to the effect of climate change on water supplies."

The legislation Hall and Hinchey are introducing would direct EPA to work with the NAS to examine the impact of climate change on water resources, government efforts to maintain water quality, and new approaches that may be needed to meet this challenge. Specifically, the study would address:

- Impacts on America's water resources, wetlands, and shorelines,
- Regional variation in precipitation patterns
- Water quality and protection efforts under the Clean Water Act
- Steps that should be taken under the Clean Water Act to account for the impacts of climate change in efforts to maintain water quality standards

Hall is the original sponsor of the bill. Hinchey, as well as U.S. Reps. George Miller (D-CA) and John Lewis (D-GA) are original co-sponsors.