

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. CON. RES. 13

Recognizing that the climate crisis disproportionately affects the health, economic opportunity, and fundamental rights of children, expressing the sense of Congress that leadership by the United States is still urgently needed to address the climate crisis, and acknowledging the need of the United States to develop a national, comprehensive, science-based, and just climate recovery plan to phase out fossil fuel emissions, protect and enhance natural carbon sequestration, and put the United States on a path toward stabilizing the climate system.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JULY 13, 2023

Mr. MERKLEY (for himself, Mr. MARKEY, Mr. WYDEN, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. BOOKER, Ms. WARREN, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. PADILLA, Mrs. MURRAY, Ms. DUCKWORTH, and Mr. WELCH) submitted the following concurrent resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Environment and Public Works

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Recognizing that the climate crisis disproportionately affects the health, economic opportunity, and fundamental rights of children, expressing the sense of Congress that leadership by the United States is still urgently needed to address the climate crisis, and acknowledging the need of the United States to develop a national, comprehensive, science-based, and just climate recovery plan to phase out fossil fuel emissions, protect and enhance natural carbon sequestration, and put the United States on a path toward stabilizing the climate system.

Whereas a stable climate system at the founding of the United States allowed human life and human civilization to flourish;

Whereas the United States was founded on the deeply rooted principle of securing “the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity”;

Whereas the Constitution of the United States protects the fundamental rights to life, liberty, property, and equal protection of the laws;

Whereas a climate system capable of sustaining human life—
(1) is fundamental to a free and ordered society; and
(2) is preservative of fundamental rights, including the rights to life, liberty, property, personal security, family autonomy, bodily integrity, and the ability to learn, practice, and transmit cultural and religious traditions;

Whereas fossil fuel use for energy in the United States has increased since the Industrial Revolution, and accelerated to the point that the national fossil fuel-based energy system has led to carbon dioxide emissions from the United States constituting more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of cumulative global carbon dioxide emissions;

Whereas the Federal Government sets the energy policy of the United States, which has resulted in a national energy system in which approximately 80 percent of the energy produced in the United States comes from fossil fuels;

Whereas the United States is the largest producer of oil and gas in the world, due in substantial part to the Federal Government—

(1) leasing Federal public land and water for fossil fuel extraction; and

(2) actively promoting, permitting, and subsidizing fossil fuel energy development and consumption;

Whereas there is an overwhelming scientific consensus that—

(1) human-caused climate change is occurring;

(2) the scale of recent changes across the climate system is unprecedented in a multimillennial context; and

(3) the accelerated rate of global heating, glacier and ice sheet melting, sea level rise, and ocean acidification as of April 2023 is a result of the buildup of atmospheric greenhouse gas emissions, primarily carbon dioxide emissions, largely from the combustion of fossil fuels;

Whereas the accumulation of atmospheric carbon dioxide levels to an annual average of 419 parts per million in 2022 has caused a dangerous planetary energy imbalance, equivalent to the quantity of energy of exploding more than 400,000 atomic bombs of the kind dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, per day, 365 days per year, across the planet;

Whereas the latest climate science and real-world observations of that energy imbalance demonstrate that the approximately 1 degree Celsius of warming that has already occurred as a result of human-caused climate change is already dangerous and negatively affecting all aspects of society and the economy of the United States;

Whereas the last time that atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide were around 400 parts per million—

(1) the seas were up to 70 to 90 feet higher;

(2) the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets largely collapsed; and

(3) coral reefs suffered a major extinction;

Whereas similar conditions will result if the United States does not drastically reduce carbon dioxide emissions in addition to naturally sequester and draw down excess concentrations of carbon dioxide already in the atmosphere from cumulative historic emissions during the 21st century;

Whereas the longer the length of time atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations remain at dangerous levels, the greater the risk of locking-in dangerous warming-driven feedback loops and triggering accelerated heating and irreversible catastrophic impact;

Whereas climate change is a threat to national security, as climate change contributes to and exacerbates global instability and conflict;

Whereas the generation of today's children was born into a climate system made harmful to their health and well-being because of human-caused climate change;

Whereas children are uniquely vulnerable to human-caused climate change because of their developing bodies, higher exposure to air, food, and water per unit of body weight, unique behavior patterns, dependence on caregivers, and longevity on the planet;

Whereas human-caused climate change is a public health emergency that is adversely and disproportionately impacting the physical health of children through—

(1) increases in extreme weather events, including increases in heavy rainfall, flooding, and hurricanes, that cause disruptive evacuations, school closures, and displacement;

(2) increases in the frequency and intensity of extreme heat waves and rising temperatures, which cause—

(A) increased heat exposure and illness, which is a leading cause of death and illness in high school athletes with nearly 10,000 episodes of heat illness occurring annually; and

(B) increases in infant mortality by 25 percent on extremely hot days, with the first 7 days of life representing a period of critical vulnerability;

(3) increases in drier conditions and drought, leading to an earlier wildfire season peak, and increased wildfire season length, wildfire frequency, and extent of burned area, which expose children—

(A) to wildfire smoke that causes substantial eye symptoms;

(B) to debilitating headaches and nausea; and

(C) to upper and lower respiratory symptoms that lead to increased rates of asthma-related hospitalizations and emergency room visits;

(4) decreased air quality as children are especially susceptible to air pollution given their developing lungs, higher ventilation rate, and higher levels of physical activity;

(5) increases in higher pollen concentrations and longer pollen season that contribute to allergic rhinitis, where 8.4 percent of children suffer from allergic rhinitis;

(6) altered infectious disease patterns;

(7) increases in food and water insecurity; and

(8) other effects;

Whereas the best scientific information available projects a 15- to 30-foot rise in sea level by the year 2100 if trends continue, with ever greater rises and acceleration in subsequent centuries, resulting in increased erosion and the loss of land, causing the loss of communities, homes, infrastructure, agriculture, and coastal ecosystems for chil-

dren affected, until a time when levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere are dramatically reduced and steps are taken to cool the upper portion of the ocean;

Whereas extreme weather events can negatively impact the mental health of children due to—

- (1) family loss or separation;
- (2) personal injury or injury of loved ones;
- (3) damage or loss to personal property and pets;
- (4) school interruption;
- (5) scarcities of food, water, and medicine shelter;
- (6) public service outages;
- (7) displacement, along with the loss of a sense of home and a safe space;
- (8) loss of nature and cultural activities; and
- (9) feelings of uncertainty about the future and a belief that their government is not protecting them from climate change, all of which result in anxiety, trauma, shock, post-traumatic stress disorder, and chronic impacts;

Whereas, without immediate steps to address human-caused climate change, the health effects of climate change on children will—

- (1) increase in severity and in terms of the number of children impacted and exposed to dangerous conditions; and
- (2) cost the United States billions of dollars per year by the end of the 21st century, with costs growing more expensive as the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere increases, and as chronic psychological consequences of climate-related stress increase;

Whereas children will largely shoulder the cost of human-caused climate change, and further increases in the glob-

al temperature will saddle children with an enormous, perhaps incalculable, cost burden, undermining the economic security of children and the United States;

Whereas, given their vulnerabilities, children are deserving of special consideration and protection with respect to human-caused climate change;

Whereas children are a politically powerless minority without economic or political power to influence climate and energy policy, as they are denied the right to vote until they become 18 years old, and their interests have been subjugated to the interests of adults;

Whereas children on the frontlines of human-caused climate change across the United States and globally have risen up and called on government leaders around the world to take concrete, science-based, and equitable action—

(1) to address human-caused climate change; and

(2) to account for intergenerational inequities to ensure environmental and climate justice for their generation and future generations, including children from vulnerable communities that have borne the brunt of climate change;

Whereas children in environmental justice communities, including communities of color, low-income communities, and indigenous communities, that have contributed the least to emissions—

(1) have long suffered from systemic environmental racism and social and economic injustices;

(2) are more likely—

(A) to reside in areas with greater exposure to air pollution;

(B) to experience long-term exposure; and

(C) to be disproportionately burdened by adverse health or environmental effects, including public health pandemics;

(3) are subjected to disproportionate energy burdens; and

(4) have less access to resources needed to cope with climate-related impacts;

Whereas global atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations must be reduced to less than 350 parts per million by the end of the 21st century, with further reductions thereafter, to restore the energy balance of the planet, stabilize the climate system, and protect the ice sheets and oceans for posterity;

Whereas existing and future adverse public health and other impacts and costs to children and the United States can be significantly mitigated if the United States acts promptly to reduce emissions from fossil fuels in the United States;

Whereas numerous experts have concluded that there are multiple technically and economically feasible pathways to place all sectors of the economy of the United States on an emissions-reduction path consistent with returning global atmospheric carbon dioxide to 350 parts per million by 2100;

Whereas producing energy in the United States with non-carbon emitting sources will—

(1) result in energy costs within the range of recent experience, ultimately saving consumers money and stabilizing the cost of energy, while increasing the number of jobs across multiple sectors in the energy sector and the supply chain; and

(2) result in many co-benefits, including public health and quality-of-life improvements, the prevention of premature death, infrastructural stability, and biodiversity protection; and

Whereas multiple Federal departments and agencies can exercise authority delegated by Congress to prevent and respond to climate change, including—

(1) the Executive Office of the President, the Council on Environmental Quality, the Office of Management and Budget, and the Office of Science and Technology Policy;

(2) the Department of Agriculture;

(3) the Department of Commerce;

(4) the Department of Defense;

(5) the Department of Energy;

(6) the Department of the Interior;

(7) the Department of State;

(8) the Department of Transportation; and

(9) the Environmental Protection Agency: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives*
2 *concurring)*, That it is the sense of Congress that—

3 (1) leadership by the United States is still ur-
4 gently needed to address the human-caused climate
5 crisis that disproportionately affects the health, eco-
6 nomic opportunity, and fundamental rights of the
7 children of the United States; and

8 (2) there is a human-caused climate crisis
9 that—

1 (A) has inspired children across the United
2 States to organize and demand immediate gov-
3 ernment action to protect their fundamental
4 rights from the perils of climate change; and

5 (B) demands a national, comprehensive,
6 science-based, and just climate recovery plan
7 that—

8 (i) is prepared by Federal depart-
9 ments and agencies pursuant to delegated
10 authority over energy and climate policy;
11 and

12 (ii) upholds the fundamental rights of
13 children and puts the United States on a
14 trajectory consistent with reducing global
15 atmospheric carbon dioxide to less than
16 350 parts per million by 2100.

○