

**U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs**

**“The Cost of Inaction: The Impacts of Climate Change and
the Financial Burden on Taxpayers”**

April 22, 2019

Ranking Member Gary C. Peters

Opening Statement

It is an undeniable fact that climate change – caused in large part by human activity – is a serious threat to Michigan, our Great lakes, our country, and our planet. Climate change not only threatens the natural resources that we all depend on, it threatens our infrastructure, health, economy, and even our national security.

As the driving force behind increasingly severe weather events, climate change is a key contributor to extreme flooding, wind damage and other destruction that is wreaking havoc on our communities and costing us billions of dollars in damage. In the last fifteen years alone, catastrophic weather events have cost the federal government – and in turn the American taxpayer roughly half a trillion dollars in disaster assistance alone.

Communities across Michigan have seen the impact of these extreme weather events, and felt the heavy financial burden these storms yield. In 2014, the Detroit metro area experienced historic rainfall and severe flooding that caused significant damage and cost more than \$1 billion dollars to repair. In Warren alone, an estimated 18,000 structures were damaged, including one in three homes. In 2017, flooding in Isabella County caused roughly \$90 million dollars in damage to public and private property. These storms hit Mid-Michigan’s agricultural producers especially hard, washing away more than \$20 million dollars of crops.

Just last year, flooding ravaged the Houghton-Hancock area with a price tag of nearly \$100 million in damage to public infrastructure – and that doesn’t even begin to account for the damage done to families’ homes and small businesses.

Our nation’s aging infrastructure simply isn’t designed to withstand the growing intensity of storms that are striking communities in Michigan and across the country. According to scientists, the Midwest is particularly vulnerable to the challenges posed by climate change.

Michigan and our neighboring states are projected to incur some of the most significant damage to our roads and bridges – mostly due to increased flooding – with costs projected to exceed \$6 billion before the end of the century.

Climate change isn't a problem for future generations to tackle, it is a dire threat we must address today. The effects are real. They are significant, they are costly, and they are already being felt here in Michigan.

Unless we quickly take bold steps to address climate change, we will not be able to turn back the clock on the damage done to our planet, and American taxpayers will be on the hook for billions of dollars in cleanup costs in the years and decades to come.

As Ranking Member of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, I am working to ensure that our government is operating efficiently and properly preparing to respond to all kinds of disasters.

Just last month, our Committee held a hearing with the Government Accountability Office on their High Risk List, an independent, nonpartisan report that identifies waste and abuse of tax dollars. At that hearing, GAO informed Congress that the federal government's inaction on climate change poses a serious financial risk to American taxpayers.

Unfortunately, the Trump Administration has not only failed to take concrete action to address climate change and its rising costs to the American people, they have proposed the complete elimination of the research and programs that help us address this serious threat in the first place. The federal government must make smart investments today to strengthen our resiliency to climate change that will protect our planet and save taxpayers billions of dollars in the long run.

Following today's summit, I will be releasing a report that highlights the growing threat from extreme weather and climate change, and the heavy financial toll taxpayers will bear if we fail to take swift action.

I'm grateful to our distinguished panel of experts for their participation in today's summit. I am looking forward to this discussion on how we can meet these daunting challenges and reduce the extreme costs presented by climate change.