

October 26, 2007

**STATEMENT FROM DR. JOHN MARBURGER REGARDING EDITING OF
THE CDC TESTIMONY**

“I am taking the unusual step of commenting on OSTP’s participation in the review of testimony given by another Executive branch agency in order to respond to reports and press statements that have alleged or insinuated that OSTP acted inappropriately. OSTP was asked to review draft CDC testimony as part of a standard interagency review process. The OSTP climate science experts who reviewed the draft testimony thought it was focused on the appropriate connections between climate change and impacts on human health, which is one of many topics in the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC’s) Working Group II (WGII) report. However, they also found that there was an overall lack of precision in aspects of the draft testimony describing important details regarding the level of certainty for specific findings, the spatial scale for which certain impacts have been assessed, and the specific nature of some climate change impacts on human health. The draft testimony did not contain reference to any sources, either to the IPCC Fourth Assessment or more recent work completed and published after the deadline for inclusion in the IPCC. This led to OSTP comments asking the authors to either make more precise reference to IPCC conclusions, or cite the new work that supports a different conclusion.

OSTP regards the science that is reflected in the IPCC’s Fourth Assessment – which was not cited or referenced in the draft testimony – as an accepted and important source of credible scientific information on the current state of climate change science. The comments of the OSTP reviewers were grounded in their in-depth understanding of the IPCC report.

The OSTP comments did not seek to redact sections of the report, but instead made a number of substantive and constructive comments and suggestions to ensure the testimony accurately represented the state of climate science and asked a number of questions intended to solicit clarity in the statements being made. My office takes our role in evaluating the scientific accuracy of Administration documents very seriously, and the comments of the OSTP reviewers in this instance were made based on their scientific knowledge of climate change science and upheld the high standards for scientific accuracy that I expect from my staff.

Several commentators have suggested that the draft testimony mapped faithfully to the IPCC’s report. Those commentators have missed or ignored several nuanced but important differences between the IPCC report’s findings and the draft testimony.”

Below are several examples:

1) **Scalability of Impacts.** The draft testimony begins by stating that “In the United

States, climate change is likely to have a significant impact on health, through links with the following outcomes,” and then lists nine main areas of climate change impacts on health. The IPCC is not an assessment of impacts in the United States.

Chapter 8 of the IPCC WGII report addresses human health impacts globally, and Chapter 14 of that same report focuses on impacts within North America – a large and diverse continent. While some studies have focused on U.S.-based impacts, it is imprecise to simply apply global or continental-scale impacts to the U.S. without a basis in more geographically-centered studies.

2) Extreme Weather Events. The draft testimony says “Climate change is anticipated to alter the frequency, timing, intensity, and duration of extreme weather events, such as hurricanes and floods.” The IPCC reports do not provide a basis for a link between hurricane *frequency* and climate change. Most of the text in the recent IPCC reports focuses on the link between hurricane *intensity* and climate change – an issue about which there is considerable debate within the scientific community. The testimony appeared to have modified a more general reference in the WGII report that “...some weather events and extremes will become more frequent, more widespread and/or more intense during the 21st century...” – a reference that may be accurately applied to certain weather events, but not, based on current science, to hurricanes.

3) Food Scarcity. The draft testimony says “Climate change is predicted to alter agricultural production, both directly and indirectly. This may lead to scarcity of some foods, increase food prices, and threaten access to food for Americans who experience food insecurity.” These statements do not reflect the full and complex consideration of agricultural impacts in the IPCC working group reports, and appear to be an ill-supported application of a potential global condition to the United States.

In fact, the IPCC WGII report, in the chapter on North America says “Research since the [last IPCC report] supports the conclusion that moderate climate change will likely increase yields on North American rain fed agriculture...Most studies project likely climate-related yield increases of 5-20% over the first decades of the century...Major challenges are projected for crops that are near the warm end of their suitable range or depend on highly utilized water resources.”

4) Mental health problems. The testimony says “Some Americans may suffer anxiety, depression, and similar symptoms in anticipating climate change and/or in coping with its effects.” The IPCC report focuses on mental health issues in the context of post-disaster effects, not in *anticipating* them, as the testimony suggests.

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