

Opening Statement
The Honorable Ralph M. Hall (R-TX), Ranking Member
The Committee on Science and Technology
Geoengineering III: Domestic and International Research Governance
March 18, 2010

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I believe this is the third hearing our Committee has held on geoengineering. As I have expressed on previous occasions, I have significant reservations about pursuing this line of research.

The debate about climate change is far from over. This statement is even more true today given the several admissions by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or IPCC, since the end of last year, regarding mistakes, miscalculations and the use of non-peer reviewed science in the 4th Assessment Report. Despite many assurances that the base science has not been compromised, our faith in the scientific community when it comes to climate change research has been severely shaken. We are now facing an onslaught of regulations that could severely harm our economy based upon this science that has now come into question.

Today's hearing focuses on domestic and international research governance of geoengineering. Although I think it is premature to be wading into this aspect of geoengineering – we have yet to agree on whether or not we should pursue this – there are several hurdles that would need to be overcome in order to implement any type of governance structure. On the domestic side, there is no way to truly verify the science without conducting experiments. Like every other test that could potentially effect the environment, an Environmental Impact Assessment would have to be conducted in order to comply with current law. Since a geoengineering experiment is supposed to affect the environment, I am not sure that such an Assessment could successfully meet current standards under the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA), as this law has been interpreted over time to ensure that any impact on the environment is minimized or eliminated.

Internationally, I find it hard to believe that there would be any kind of consensus on this issue. And, as we witnessed with the Copenhagen conference last December, when a larger consensus breaks down, a small group of nations may try to work out a deal amongst themselves. If world leaders decide to come together and seriously discuss geoengineering, it could force a situation where some nations feel justified embarking on their own program. Geoengineering could have global repercussions, so it is especially troubling that one or more nations could band together to produce an outcome that could have global implications, such as attempting to mimic a volcanic eruption.

So, Mr. Chairman, while I am interested in the testimony of our witnesses today, I must state that I am skeptical of this research and wary of the potential diplomatic minefield we may be stumbling into if we pursue this. I look forward to hearing from our distinguished witnesses.