



A Blueprint for Success: U.S. Climate Action at the Local Level

June 17, 2019

Senator Brian Schatz, Chair
Opening statement (as prepared)

It's my pleasure to welcome you all to the first hearing of the Senate Democrats' Special Committee on the Climate Crisis.

Climate change is a planetary emergency – one that will touch every aspect of American life – which is why it is essential that this committee be created. Over the coming months, we will establish the predicate for action. Through hearings both here in Congress and out in the field, we will build the record and the coalitions needed to move forward.

And we will do that because our members are people who lead on climate in different ways.

They have personal relationships with farmers who have lost everything, or who risk being the last generation of farmers in their families because of climate. They have constituents who count on fisheries being sustainable for years to come. They are focused on tribal communities and rural communities, communities of color and communities that rely on tourism. And they are worried about how climate change threatens our workforce, our economic growth, and our national security.

Most of all, this committee understands the need to build a big tent for climate action. The local, national, and international problems of climate change won't be solved if we leave behind unions, or ignore the lessons already learned by utility companies or the leaders we'll hear from today.

Which is why I am disappointed and concerned that this committee is missing representation from the other side of the aisle. There is a way to address climate that is consistent with conservative principles. And we know there is a bipartisan path forward, because we have bipartisan bills on things like tax relief for climate mitigation... stronger protections for flood-prone communities... and plans for the increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters.

So this committee should be bipartisan, and one day it will be. But right now, we cannot wait – and we will not wait – for the other side to catch up to the severity of the climate crisis, and the urgency for action.

Others certainly haven't waited. For years now, there has been impressive momentum and innovation at the local level. Mayors are on the front lines of floods, heat waves, and wildfires, and they know their communities expect them to do something. Put simply, there is no denying action when the water is at the doorstep. For them and for us, doing nothing is not an option.

But as we will hear today, there is a lot of good that can come from climate action. It leads to cleaner, healthier, and more prosperous cities... to a more resilient economy... to job growth in new sectors. So today we will hear from mayors who are leading their cities and the nation in mitigating and adapting to climate change.

I'd like to welcome:

- Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, from Atlanta, Georgia
- Mayor Kirk Caldwell from Honolulu, Hawaii
- Mayor Melvin Carter from Saint Paul, Minnesota
- Mayor William Peduto from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
- and Mayor Ted Wheeler from Portland, Oregon.

Thank you for being here. You know better than almost anyone about how local policies and investments can work – or how they don't. You know the programs that provide the biggest benefits, and the investments that don't leave behind parts of your communities.

So we are looking forward to hearing your experiences, and, most importantly, your views on how the federal government can help. We'll begin by hearing testimony from each of the witnesses going down the line, starting with Mayor Bottoms.