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TESTIMONY OF DR. PETER GLEICK TO CONGRESS: Climate Change is Happening Faster than Predicted; Both Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies are Crucial

Washington, D.C., December 1, 2010: Pacific Institute President Peter Gleick told Congress today that there is growing evidence from the real world that climate changes are accelerating faster than originally feared and that impacts – already appearing – will be more widespread and severe than expected. This makes the arguments against taking actions against climate change not just wrong, but dangerous.

Dr. Gleick, President of the non-partisan Pacific Institute, a hydroclimatologist and member of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, testified at the December 1 hearing of the Congressional Select Committee on Energy and Global Warming at the behest of Chairman Edward Markey. His remarks addressed America’s ongoing struggle to deal with increasingly severe climate challenges and the risks and opportunity those challenges pose for the nation’s energy and economic security, and he offered effective strategies that can be done immediately with a focus on energy, land-use, and water policy.

“The United States and the rest of the world have waited too long to act to cut the emissions of damaging greenhouse gas pollutants,” said Gleick. “We are now committed to irreversible long-term and inevitably damaging consequences ranging from rapidly rising sea levels, far greater heat stress and damages, disappearing glaciers and snowpack, more flooding and droughts, and far, far more.”

Dr. Gleick testified that responsible action is needed to slow the rate of these changes and to reduce the ultimate cost to the U.S. economy and public health, which means that planning adaptation strategies now is crucial.

“Every major international scientific organization working in the areas of geophysics, climate, geology, biology, chemistry, physics, ecology, atmospheric sciences, and meteorology agrees that humans are changing the climate,” said Gleick. “Ignoring the massive weight of this consensus is irresponsible.”

According to Gleick’s testimony, the nation now faces only three options: 1) work to reduce the severity of future climate change through efforts to cut or mitigate emissions of greenhouse pollutants; 2) work to adapt to unavoidable climatic change already locked into the system; and 3) suffer the consequences of changing climate. The question is how much of each option we do.

Among the strategies Gleick presented to the Congressional committee are the need for:

- a national energy policy focused on renewable, non-carbon energy sources, with federal financing, tax credits, and loan guarantees for renewable energy and improved transmission;
- environmental standards for greenhouse gas emissions, including not just carbon dioxide but methane, hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), and black carbon soot; and

- beginning the process of adapting to unavoidable impacts through smarter land-use and water-use planning.

“A wide range of impacts, ranging from sea-level rise to changing water availability to altered crop production to human health effects from heat and spreading tropical diseases, are already beginning to appear,” said Gleick. “Such impacts will be costly to society – probably far more costly than efforts to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. But we tend to focus on the latter costs alone, not the growing costs of adaptation and suffering.”

Gleick urged attention from Congress, as the impacts of unavoidable climate change will increase in extent and severity the longer we continue to delay efforts to reduce greenhouse gases. The Congressional testimony is available at:

http://www.pacinst.org/publications/testimony/gleick_testimony_climate_strategies.pdf

Dr. Peter Gleick is one of the world’s leading experts on water issues, a MacArthur Fellow, member of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, Academician of the International Water Academy, and coauthor and editor of the biennial series *The World’s Water*. He is cofounder and president of the Pacific Institute in Oakland, Calif., a nonpartisan research institute that works to create a healthier planet and sustainable communities. Through interdisciplinary research and partnering with stakeholders, the Institute produces solutions that advance environmental protection, economic development, and social equity – in California, nationally, and internationally. www.pacinst.org