

Last month, Congress passed and Trump signed a provision in the Defense Authorization Act that designates climate change a serious threat to national security. That was a historic first. I [blogged](#) about the bill last month, but it seemed worthwhile to investigate this surprising development further. Although there's no direct evidence, there are strong indications of some quiet nudging from the Pentagon along the way. Surprisingly, some 46 House Republicans stood up on a divided vote in support of the bill.

The story begins in a House committee. The climate change provision was [added](#) by Representative Jim Langevin in the committee markup of the authorization bill in the House. Langevin is the senior Democrat on the Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee. He has a remarkable personal [story](#), having been struck as a 16-year-old by a bullet that left him a quadriplegic. But as far as I can tell from his website, his primary focus is cyberwarfare, not climate change, and the climate issue gets only a brief mention on his official website. (It's just a paragraph under [Energy and Environment](#), which itself is one of about a dozen issues under the Issues tab.) So this wasn't part of a climate change crusade on his part. On the other hand, if someone at the Pentagon who worked on climate change wanted something done, Langevin would be an obvious person to go to because of his membership on the Emerging Threats Subcommittee.

On the floor, Scott Perry sponsored [an amendment](#) to strip the climate provision. Perry is from the 4th Pennsylvania District, which adjoins Maryland. Despite an admirable military record, Perry has a mildly questionable background, having been [charged](#) with falsifying sewage records for his business and negotiating his way into a diversion program. Perry seems to be a Tea Party Republican — a member of the Freedom Caucus and the Second Amendment caucus. And he once [accused](#) a CNN host of lying about how bad things were in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria.

Two Republicans [spoke](#) against Perry's floor amendment: Reps. [Elise Stefanik](#) (R-N.Y.) and [Ileana Ros-Lehtinen](#) (R-Fla.). Ros-Lehtinen is from Miami. She's voted with Trump 71% of the time and is considered a moderate, at least by House Republican standards. The senior member of the Florida congressional legislation, she's staunchly conservative on many matters, but also an advocate of LGBT rights.

Stefanik, the other Republican to speak against the floor amendment, is someone to keep an eye on. She was the first in her immediate family to go to college (Harvard), and she went on to serve on the staff of the Domestic Policy Council in the Bush White House. Stefanik earlier sponsored a [resolution](#) urging the House to

take a serious look at the climate issue. She's chair of the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities, which seems like a plum assignment for someone who's only been in Congress three years, not to mention the fact that she's only 33. Maybe she'll get washed out in the midterms, which are bound to be tough on Republicans from New York. Even if that happens, I'd bet she lands on her feet.

Perry's floor amendment to strip Langevin's climate change provision [failed](#), leaving it in the bill. The vote on Perry's amendment was 185-234, with 46 Republicans crossing the aisle to vote against the amendment and in favor of the climate provision. (The roll call vote is [here](#), if you're interested). Among the votes against the Perry amendment were 22 Republican members of the House Climate Solutions Caucus, including Darryl Issa of California (better known for his anti-environmental record.) According to one of its co-chairs, the [mission](#) of the caucus is to "educate members on economically-viable options to reduce climate risk and to explore bipartisan policy options that address the impacts, causes, and challenges of our changing climate." It currently has 60 members, equally split between Democrats and Republicans. In any event, another 24 GOP House members outside that caucus voted against the Perry amendment, and it's not clear what was motivating them.

Because the Perry Amendment failed, the climate proviso stayed in the bill, which then easily passed the House. After that, it doesn't seem to have attracted any further attention in the Senate. The appropriations bill landed on Trump's desk, where he signed it. As I noted in my earlier post, he didn't comment on the climate provision either in his oral remarks or in his formal signing statement.

Why is there is good reason to suspect that the Pentagon had a hand in this process? President Obama had issued a directive to the Pentagon to study the national security implications of climate change. Trump rescinded that directive, but the Pentagon dragged its feet and began a [review](#) of its internal directive implementing Obama's order to see if that needed to be modified or withdrawn. The Pentagon had already engaged in considerable study of the impacts of climate change. Secretary Mattis is a firm believer in the importance of this issue. During his confirmation hearings, he [told](#) the Senate Armed Services Committee that:

"The effects of a changing climate — such as increased maritime access to the Arctic, rising sea levels, desertification, among others — impact our security situation. I will ensure that the department continues to be

prepared to conduct operations today and in the future, and that we are prepared to address the effects of a changing climate on our threat assessments, resources, and readiness.”

And in fact, the Defense Department has [engaged](#) in a series of actions to address climate issue. Trump’s directive threatened to get in the way of these actions, but the new law handily takes care of that problem.

Beyond its immediate practical effect, the law reflects the first time that both Congress and the President have formally recognized the reality and seriousness of climate change. That’s something that should be featured in every lawsuit against the Trump Administration’s regulatory rollbacks. We have Jim Langevin, Elise Stefanik, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, and the Climate Solutions Caucus to thank for this important development. And perhaps, in the background, Jim Mattis.