

Rep. Sensenbrenner's Opening Statement for Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming hearing: "New Energy Technologies: What's Around The Corner?"

July 28, 2009

Today's hearing on clean energy asks "what's around the corner" and focuses on two types of energy production: clean coal technology and solar power. These power sources should compete with each other in an open market and with other sources like nuclear power, wind energy, hydropower and other advanced technologies. Competition will drive technological advancement, and technology will improve our energy security and reduce our carbon dioxide emissions.

Congress cannot choose the winners and losers in this competition.

Experience and the market must dictate which of these technologies are viable and what mix of them can best power our economy. What's best for D.C. may not be what's best for my district in Wisconsin, which is why Republicans call their energy policy "all of the above." "All of the above" means allowing all technologies a fair opportunity to compete.

Competition between businesses drives economic growth, but if bureaucratic carbon emissions schemes like cap-and-tax become law, new technology will compete for government subsidies and emissions credits, not for new consumers. GM and Chrysler are examples of what's to come. These companies accepted government bailout funds to stay in business and then invested it in lobbying the federal government on climate change legislation. While perhaps lucrative in the short term, government subsidies cannot sustain our economy.

Coal accounts for half of all electricity generated in the United States.

We cannot keep the lights on through our lifetime without it. Finding a way to use it cleanly is therefore critical.

Clean coal technology has seen some promising developments recently.

In June, researchers in Wisconsin announced a successful carbon capture test at the We Energies Pleasant Prairie facility. There, researchers were able to use chilled ammonia technology to capture nearly 90 percent of targeted carbon dioxide emissions.

I welcome Gary Spitznogle of American Electric Power, who is here to tell the Select Committee about his company's 20 megawatt test project at the Mountaineer Power Plant in New Haven, West Virginia. This project is larger than the Pleasant Prairie test project and utilizes the same chilled ammonia technology. Hopefully, this is the next step forward in the development of carbon capture and storage technology.

While this project could be the next step in development of this technology, it is not the final step. The Mountaineer Power Plant is a 1,300 megawatt plant. The 20 megawatts test project is capturing just a small fraction of the carbon emissions that could be stored.

With its aggressive cap on carbon, policies like cap-and-tax could lead utilities and researchers to abandon carbon capture and storage technology before it advances. Many utilities will be tempted to move onto natural gas or other technologies that will help meet their carbon cap. That could end development of clean coal technology and potentially leave America's most affordable and abundant source of

energy out of the mix. Let us hope that is not what lies around the corner.

Clean coal is showing promising technological developments. Coal can and must remain a central part of a diverse energy portfolio that includes renewable technologies like wind and solar and other carbon-neutral technologies like nuclear power and hydropower. I look forward to learning more about these technologies and how government policy can encourage the development of a diverse portfolio of energy production that strengthens both U.S. security and the environment.

###