

Opening Statement for Mr. Sensenbrenner

House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming

“Geopolitical Implications of Rising Oil Dependence and Global Warming,” April 18, 2007

I want to welcome everyone to this first ever oversight hearing of the House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming.

Contrary to some press reports, this is not a new issue. As former chairman of the House Science Committee, I held numerous hearings on this topic. During that time, I heard my fair share of extreme predictions, dire forecasts and gloomy outlooks.

This committee has no legislative jurisdiction, and if we're to find a workable solution to climate change problems, I believe we need to be realistic and talk about common-sense ideas and common-sense solutions.

Unfortunately, this debate hasn't been characterized by common sense. It's been characterized by extremism. While this extremism hasn't done anything to produce effective solutions, it has created a lot of hot air, which hasn't been good for Congress' carbon footprint.

But extremism has produced a lot of fear. Take this story from Monday's Washington Post as an example. The headline reads: “Climate Change Scenarios Scare, and Motivate, Kids.” In this story, one 9-year-old student foresees an Earth that 20 years from now will have no oxygen.

There is no credible scientific evidence to support such a cataclysmic fear, yet with all of the scary news I've seen on this issue, how can you blame children for being afraid?

I know that this is an area where the science seems to be most skewed, and politicians and pundits aren't doing much to clarify. While science has taught us many things about climate change and greenhouse gases, one area where there is no scientific consensus, contrary to popular belief, is the effects of climate change.

Perhaps nowhere is this divergence more evident than in some of the claims made by former Vice President Al Gore. In his movie, he predicts a 20-foot rise in sea levels. But what does the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predict? A 23-inch rise in sea levels.

There is a world of difference between 20 feet and 23 inches. No wonder that poor child is scared.

In fact, many scientists have questioned Mr. Gore's doomsday scenarios. A recent article in the New York Times chronicled several scientists call to “cool the hype.” One scientist said Mr. Gore was “overselling our certainty about knowing the future.”

One thing that is certain is that some of the solutions proposed by extremists would have devastating effects on the economy. Europe has adopted these so-called solutions. The results? Soaring electricity rates; factories slowing down because they're too expensive to power; jobs moving to countries that aren't subject to the regulations

Will Europe's environment benefit from the slowdown of its economy? I doubt it.

The Republican members of this committee care about the environment and about the economy. And Republicans on this committee know we can protect both.

I will have many questions about why global warming has suddenly become an issue of national defense. I do agree that, as a country, we need to reduce our dependence on foreign oil. We especially need to reduce our energy dependence on countries that don't share our democratic values.

New technology, along with wind and solar power, can help us reduce our dependence. So can nuclear power. If done right, we can implement these new power sources and reduce our carbon output and dependence on foreign oil, without devastating our economy.

These are the types of solutions that my Republican colleagues and I will be seeking.

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