

Mr. Sensenbrenner's Opening Statement for Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming hearing: "Voluntary Carbon Offsets – Getting What You Pay For."

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Today's hearing may be the most relevant yet in the short life of this select committee. Offsets hold the potential to help control greenhouse gas emissions, especially carbon dioxide. They also hold the potential to give people warm, fuzzy feelings for saving the Earth, while actually doing nothing to tangibly help the environment. I hope today's hearing helps us learn which it is.

The U.S. Supreme Court recently ruled that carbon dioxide can be regulated like a pollutant. Despite this fact, billions and billions of plants around the world will continue to breathe this naturally-occurring gas, and exhale the oxygen that supports the diversity of life all over this planet.

While I question if the term pollution is appropriate for carbon dioxide, I do not question that there are some significant scientific findings to show that this gas is contributing to global warming.

Many who advocate taxes and regulations as a solution to global warming like to emphasize their point by using the image of smokestacks emitting dirty black soot into the air.

But that image is a bit dishonest, isn't it? We're not here to talk about that black smoke; it's an entirely different environmental issue that is regulated by, and under the jurisdiction of, a different committee.

Global warming is all about the clear, invisible gas that doesn't show up in those menacing photographs: carbon dioxide. Whether it comes from a coal-fired power plant or the mouth of former Vice President Al Gore, carbon dioxide is plant food, and this fact helps create many possible solutions to the global warming problem.

By breathing carbon dioxide, trees help take it out of the atmosphere. That's why I've said that smart, healthy forest management should be part of any global warming policy.

Trees can also play a part in the global warming solution by being a carbon offset. In fact, trees live up to one of the principles I've staunchly advocated by providing an actual, tangible benefit to the environment. We not only know that trees take carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, we generally know how much they take out.

Some carbon offset projects also have the potential to promote and advance technology, which lives up to another principle I've championed. I'm still not sure if fertilizing carbon-dioxide eating plankton would be an effective global warming solution; that's up to the scientists to determine. But this idea is an example of the creative possibilities that technology can produce.

However, while offsets hold some potential to control carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, we also have to be realistic about the true capacities of offsetting.

We can't offset our way out of the global warming problem. We certainly can't offset our way to meet Mr. Gore's goal of 80 percent greenhouse gas reductions by 2050. The only way to meet these goals is the development and promotion of technology that creates energy without also emitting carbon dioxide, such as nuclear power, renewable energy or carbon sequestration.

I'm also very concerned that offsetting is the first step on the path to onerous global warming regulations. Depending on how offsetting is structured, there is the potential for fantastic abuse of taxpayer dollars.

Some offset projects can be legitimate, such as tree plantings, wind energy and biomass fuels. Yet other projects are questionable, and

in some cases, may even border on fraud. Does investing in an energy project that would have happened anyway really make you carbon neutral? Call me skeptical. There are also indications that some offsets are counted twice, which doesn't get the world any closer to carbon neutrality.

Carbon offsets give those who are deeply concerned about global warming an option to put their money where their mouth is without having to adopt Grizzly Adam's lifestyle. But as is always the case when money changes hands, let the buyer beware. The carbon offset industry is a business, but buyers of offsets should use due diligence in researching these firms and their standards before handing over a check.

And that goes for the federal government too.