

**Mr. Sensenbrenner's Opening Statement for Select  
Committee on Energy Independence and Global  
Warming hearing: "Wildfires and the Climate Crisis."**

**Nov. 1, 2007**

Like all natural disasters, the recent wildfires in Southern California have taken an enormous toll in lives and property damage. With seven dead, 2,000 homes destroyed, 640,000 people displaced and possibly up to \$2 billion in damages, wildfires have again showed they are a deadly threat to people living in the arid West, just as hurricanes have proven to be a deadly and destructive threat to people living on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts.

Death and destruction aren't the only thing wildfires and hurricanes share in common. They are both now being used as poster children for global warming. While both of these severe weather events are common and occur naturally, global warming alarmists are using these natural disasters to promote regulations that will have little or no effect on these forces of nature.

In regards to global warming, there are many similarities between hurricanes and wildfires. In both cases, they are complicated natural events influenced by a variety of factors. And yes, in both cases, warmer temperatures can create conditions that would amplify the effects of these disasters.

But just like hurricanes, there is no concrete scientific link between the Southern California wildfires and global warming. And even if there were, members of Congress would be fooling themselves to think that by passing a bill to supposedly do something about global warming that they would have any measurable impact on the ground in Southern California.

What would have a measurable impact in California, and other parts of the country, are smart forestry practices. Liberal environmentalists have long fought to prevent management of our

forestry, which exacerbates many problems that make forest fires worse.

By allowing forests to grow unmanaged, it allows for grasses, underbrush, dead trees and other growth to serve as kindling for these fires. As the wildfires were raging last week, the Los Angeles Times reported that forest thinning helped the resort town of Lake Arrowhead avoid the worst of the damage. The Times described the area as an “island in a sea of destruction.”

By creating what are known as “fuel breaks,” residents of Lake Arrowhead were able to see firsthand the effect of forest thinning as they watched the billowing fires stop nearly dead in their tracks. Forest thinning produces a tangible, measurable environmental benefit. I wouldn't support any global warming legislation that doesn't result in measurable environmental benefits.

There is another similarity between hurricanes and wildfires that Dr. Steven Running points out in his testimony today. Just like hurricanes, the damage suffered by wildfires often is a result of where you live. Live by the ocean and your chances of your house getting knocked down by a hurricane are much greater than those more inland. The same is true for those who build in the wildland urban interface, where the dangers of wildfires are the greatest.

As the fires raged, the Los Angeles Times also posed the question of whether global warming was part of the problem. The answer appears to be a qualified “no.” Quoting the journal Science, the Times reported that, unlike the rest of the West, there has been no increase in wildfire frequency in Southern California.

Pointing out the potential problems of global warming is easy.

What should also be easy is preparing for natural disasters through adaptive management techniques, like forest thinning and fuel breaks for wildland fires.

The hard part is finding ways to promote the development of energy sources that don't emit carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. If we can do this, we would truly be doing something about global warming.

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