

**Mr. Sensenbrenner's Opening Statement for Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming hearing: "On Thin Ice: The Future of the Polar Bear:"**

**Jan. 17, 2008**

The polar bear is a majestic and fascinating creature that should be observed, admired and protected. And its habitat is declining.

The price of crude oil is reaching \$100 a barrel. And the U.S. needs more, not less, access to domestic oil and gas reserves.

But I'm afraid that at this hearing of the select committee charged with examining the nexus of energy independence and global warming, the polar bear is simply becoming a political tool.

There has been some cynical speculation in the media and among some others that the polar bear is just a few decades from extinction and that the current Administration is ready and willing to further diminish the polar bear's plight in order to help the oil and gas industry.

I believe that nothing could be further from the truth, and it is my hope that this hearing can help address some of these misconceptions.

Currently, the Administration is looking at two decisions that while interrelated, are decided under two different laws that support two different policy goals – protection of the polar bear and progress on energy security through development of domestic oil and gas reserves.

For more than a year, the Department of the Interior has been studying whether to list the polar bear as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. This is a complicated and nuanced question, but one whose answer must be based solely on the best scientific and commercial information about the polar bear.

If the scientists and wildlife managers at the Interior Department determine that the polar bear should be listed a threatened species, then the U.S. should take all required steps under the Endangered Species Act to protect the polar bear. I note that regardless of whether the polar bear is listed under the Endangered Species Act, it is already being protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

The Interior Department's Minerals Management Service has also decided to move forward with oil and gas lease sales in Alaska's Chukchi Sea (chuck-chee sea,) which is part of the polar bears' habitat.

Should the polar bear be listed, then oil and gas companies will then have to take all appropriate efforts to ensure that their exploration and production are done in a manner required by the Endangered Species Act. The timing of these separate decisions is incidental to protecting the polar bear.

The hallmark of the Endangered Species Act is that listing decisions need to be based solely on sound scientific and commercial information, and not politics. I worry that today's hearing will focus too much on the politics and not enough on the science, and that certainly isn't good news for the polar bears or for energy security.

I see no reason to delay the February 6 sale of Chukchi Sea oil and gas leases. The need to protect the polar bear doesn't change the need for new domestic oil and gas reserves, and conducting the oil and gas leases will not impact polar bear protections. Both goals can be accomplished, and it's my hope that they are.

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