U.S. House of Representatives

Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming

F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr., Ranking Republican

News Advisory

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Consumers Deserve Transparency on Green Products, Services

Sensenbrenner: 'Green' Cloak Sometimes Shrouds True Benefits

Washington, D.C., Feb. 26, 2008 – U.S. Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner, R-Wis., ranking Republican on the House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming, made the following statement during today's hearing titled, "Food for Thought: Sustainability from Counter to Compost:"

"Today we are talking about the food chain and its impacts on greenhouse gas emissions. It seems from the testimony we'll hear today that by making changes to the way food is delivered, prepared, stored and disposed, we can create some positive environmental benefits.

"But there are costs associated with these changes. In the long run, these costs may be worth it. Or maybe they're not. It points to a larger problem with all things 'green' being sold to us today.

"One of the projects we'll hear a lot about today is part of Speaker Pelosi's 'Green the Capitol' initiative. This project includes many changes to the House food service operations, and we welcome Chief Administrative Officer Dan Beard here to talk about them.

"But do the costs associated with these changes create worthwhile greenhouse gas reductions? Simply put, are we getting the most bang for the buck? Some changes, like serving cage-free eggs or hormone-free dairy, will result in no greenhouse gas reductions whatsoever. One of my four guiding principles in evaluating any global warming policy is will it produce a tangible, measurable environmental benefit? The House food services project seems to leave that question open, which raises concerns.

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“If the point is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, could the money spent making wholesale changes to House food services be better focused on creating more energy efficiency in the House. It’s unclear to me if there’s enough transparency in this process to actually measure if these changes are worth it.

“Mr. Beard’s testimony points towards many simple changes in lighting, heating and cooling that could end up saving the taxpayers $20,000. That’s a good thing. It’s just too bad that $89,000 in taxpayers dollars have apparently gone towards questionable carbon offsets in an effort for the House to reach the goals of its “Green the Capitol” initiative.

“As the Washington Post reported in late January, it seems some of the offsets are very questionable. The report showed that these offsets produced little in the way of ‘additionality.’ That is, it was difficult to show how those taxpayers dollars did anything to create greenhouse gas reductions that wouldn’t have occurred anyway.

“This article shows to me that there needs to be more transparency when dealing with all things “green.” It seems obvious that there are many opportunities for waste, fraud, abuse or questionable actions to be hidden in a ‘green’ cloak.

“Do changes to the House cafeteria produce more or better environmental benefits for the dollar than improvements in energy efficiency? Do offsets really produce greenhouse gas reductions, and if so, how much? These are questions that both policy makers and consumers should have answers to.

“Many of the changes talked about today in the food service industry will come down to consumer choice. Living in a carbon free environment will have significant costs and trade offs associated with them. It will take consumers, and not Congress, to tell us if these lifestyle changes are worth it.”

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