

Mr. Sensenbrenner's Opening Statement for Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming hearing: "Nuclear Power in a Warming World: Solution or Illusion?"

March 12, 2008

Today, I will talk about the merits of nuclear energy, which is a technology that stands to produce real results in reducing greenhouse gases. But, first, let me be clear, I understand that nuclear technology has drawbacks too, as do renewable resources and fossil fuels.

While some here today will try to sell the merits of one technology over another, I will not do that. Because, in the end, members of Congress are setting policy, not selling energy. It is the utilities and energy producers who will sell energy and electricity in the marketplace. I believe it should be the marketplace, and not regulators or policy makers, which ultimately decides what sources of energy are the most realistic for the future. It is not Congress' job to pick winners and losers, but I worry that many on this panel aim to do just that.

Nuclear power is efficient and cost-effective and I believe in many places, the right answer for our electricity needs. But it's not the right answer for all places.

Nuclear power is an especially useful solution for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Mr. Alex Flint, senior vice president of the Nuclear Energy Institute, will testify today that the 439 nuclear plants worldwide help avoid 2.6 billion tons of CO₂ each year. That's more than three times the amount of carbon dioxide produced by all the cars in the U.S. in 2005. I welcome Mr. Flint's testimony and look forward to learning more about the potential that nuclear power offers the world.

Nuclear power is such a powerful greenhouse gas reducing technology that the Nobel Peace Prize winning U.N. International Panel on Climate Change cited nuclear power as one of the key technologies for addressing global warming in the future.

As I stated at our hearing last week, renewable energy has its own set of benefits and drawbacks, and is not technically feasible for all areas of the country.

But renewable energy should be an increasing part of our energy future, just like nuclear power, energy efficiency and fossil fuels. The world's future energy needs require us to maintain a diverse portfolio of energy technologies.

And while some today will highlight the drawbacks of nuclear power, they do so without fully acknowledging the drawbacks of other technologies they support. For instance, a recent story in the Washington Post reported on the industrial pollution left behind by Chinese solar energy panel producers. And the New York Times reported this week that a biodiesel plant in Alabama is producing pollution as a byproduct, and dumping it into a local river. Kermit the frog was right; it's not easy being green.

As I've said many times, the advancement of technology must be part of any energy security or global warming policy. Nuclear power should be a key part of the diverse array of technologies needed for the future. Plus, nuclear power's potential for reducing greenhouse gases can't be ignored by anyone who thinks this is a pressing priority for the world.

If we are searching for realistic solutions, nuclear power can't be ignored.

###