

Mr. Sensenbrenner's Opening Statement for Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming hearing: "The Future of LIHEAP Funding: Will Families Get the Cold Shoulder this Winter?"

Sept 25, 2008

Yesterday, the House finally acknowledged the importance of expanding our domestic energy production capabilities, and voted to lift the congressional ban on offshore drilling.

For people who rely on oil and natural gas for home heating, this is welcome news, especially since there are enormous potential supplies off of the U.S. coasts. For example, the Minerals Management Service estimates that the Outer Continental Shelf contains 420 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, which is enough to heat all residential homes in the U.S. for more than 90 years.

We will hear today from Energy Information Administration that households using oil and natural gas for heating are expected to face as much as 30 percent higher costs this winter over last. In the long run, opening our domestic supplies will undoubtedly lower the price of oil and natural gas, which will have many positive economic benefits, especially for those trying to survive future cold winters.

The move yesterday by the House to drop the drilling ban is a positive first step, but it's only the first step in the comprehensive energy plan America needs to help lower energy costs and secure our energy future. There is still much more to be done to promote alternative energy, clean coal, nuclear power and energy efficiency, all of which are part of Republicans' "all of the above" energy proposal.

For starters, the House today should follow the Senate's lead and make sure the renewable energy production tax credit is extended, so that the technology behind solar and wind power can continue to develop.

Advancement of technology is one of the major themes I've emphasized throughout the 54 hearings that this Select Committee has convened during this Congress.

With today's hearing being possibly the last of this congressional session, I think now would be a good time for me to summarize some of what I've learned by serving on this Select Committee.

From the outset, I laid out four principles that I thought must be met for any legislation addressing global warming or energy independence: first, it must produce tangible improvements to the environment; second, it must advance technological progress; third, it must protect jobs and the economy; and finally, it must require global participation, including emerging economies like China and India.

One thing that became clear to me is that many in Congress are still relying on unproven ideas to address our energy crisis and to confront climate change. By looking only at cap-and-trade schemes, many members of Congress still see taxes and expensive regulations as the way to move our energy economy forward.

But we have learned that this policy, that in the spirit of truthfulness I call cap-and-tax, has failed to date to produce reductions in greenhouse gases in Europe and would impose enormous costs on the U.S. economy if adopted here.

Today marks the start of the sale of allowances within the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, which is a voluntary cap-and-tax system adopted by a handful of Northeastern states. I wish them better luck than the Europeans have experienced, but I am skeptical that this scheme will enable the needed progress on technology or energy security.

This Select Committee has also heard repeatedly about the tremendous amount of resources and technology available here in the U.S. to help expand our energy diversity and improve our energy security.

By maintaining sensible tax policies and robust research and development funding, the government can help these technologies develop, and let them compete among each other in the market on price and efficiency. Some believe that government should mandate certain technologies, but I don't believe that government should pick winners and losers. Energy consumers should do that.

During the hearings of this Select Committee, I've learned that technological innovation provides the best path to energy security and the best options for confronting climate change. I know that my experience on this committee has only strengthened my belief in these principles, and I hope the next Congress will consider these important points as we continue to address these issues in the future.

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