

A Congressman's Position on Climate Change

U. S. Congressman Jim Sensenbrenner of Wisconsin presented his position on climate change at a luncheon on August 25, 2009 at the Calgary Chamber of Commerce.

Markus Ermisch of Sun Media prepared the following report on the presentation:

A cap-and-trade system could be economically ruinous and merely transfer wealth without reducing carbon emissions, Republican Congressman Jim Sensenbrenner told a Calgary audience yesterday.

"What is politically correct is economic suicide," Sensenbrenner, a member of the Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming, said during a speech dealing with U.S. environmental policy and the upcoming UN climate change conference in Copenhagen.

Cap and trade, a system in which companies exceeding government-set emission limits are fined, "is something that plunks a cost-benefit analysis no matter how you look at it."

Once it's introduced, it'll be an "indirect tax folded into the cost of energy" that will increase energy costs across the spectrum, Sensenbrenner said.

"If they were honest, they'd have a direct carbon tax," he said about the governments of Canada and the U.S., both of which favour a cap-and-trade system.

A government that would introduce a carbon tax would be "booted out of office" at the next election, he said.

That, however, wasn't the case in B.C., where Gordon Campbell's Liberals became the first jurisdiction in North America last year to introduce a consumer-based carbon tax.

Campbell won this year's provincial election and credits carbon tax as one reason for his victory.

Nonetheless, Sensenbrenner's central argument -- namely that cap and trade would be expensive to both consumers and industry -- is contrary to Ottawa's stance on the issue: One month ago, Environment Minister Jim Prentice told the Sun's editorial board Canada's green policies, which include a domestic cap-and-trade system, "does not need to be expensive" if it is done "in an orderly way over a long period of time with smart policies."

But there's another element to cap and trade.

Don Rigney, chairman of Alberta's Industrial Heartland Association and mayor of Sturgeon County, said he has yet to hear a compelling argument that such a system won't export jobs or merely shift emissions elsewhere.

He said he agrees with Sensenbrenner that technology, not legislation, should be used to reduce carbon emissions.

MARKUS.ERMISCH@SUNMEDIA.CA

Biography of Congressman Sensenbrenner:

F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr., (Jim), represents the Fifth Congressional District of Wisconsin. After serving ten years in the Wisconsin State Legislature, Jim ran for a U.S. House seat and was elected in November, 1978. He has been re-elected since 1980.

Jim's current committee assignments include serving as the Ranking Member on the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties and the Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming. Jim also serves serving on the Committee on the Judiciary and the Committee on Science and Technology. He will be one of the representatives for the US in Copenhagen at the climate change talks.

He is former Chairman of the Judiciary Committee and as a long-serving committee member, Jim has established a strong record on crime, intellectual property and constitutional issues. Previously, Jim also served as Chairman of the House Committee on Science, where he solidified his reputation as an independent leader on science issues, as well as oversight.