

Opening Statement
Rep. Christopher H. Smith
Ranking Member, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
Hearing: “Cleaning the Air, Feeding the Fuel Tank: Understanding the
Link between Energy and Environmental Security”
May 6, 2008

Thank you Mr. Chairman. Welcome to our witnesses, and to everyone who has joined us today. I am very pleased that we are examining the relationship between the world’s growing energy consumption and our overburdened environment.

Congress has an obligation to work to ensure a healthy and safe environment for the benefit of current and future generations. To reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and achieve a healthier environment, we need a multi-faceted approach that addresses the tangled web of issues involved. We need to foster both energy independence and clean energy.

As ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee’s Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health, I’m particularly concerned about the relationship between energy issues and the sharp rise in food prices in the developing world. Although right now food prices are rising in the United States, in general and for most of our lives, Americans have benefited from relatively low food prices. In fact, the average U.S. consumer spends less than 10 percent of his or her income on food, while in much of the developing world families spend 60-80 percent on food. We can easily see how even small increases in food prices can bring real tragedy to poor countries.

For almost twenty years I've been working on the broad issue of climate change. Back in 1989 I offered an amendment addressing global warming to legislation before the House. In 1990 I introduced a bill that addressed the international aspects of global climate change.

It's been a long road, but we've taken some important steps. In 2007 I joined with my good friend and colleague, the late Tom Lantos, on the International Climate Cooperation Re-engagement Act of 2007. Portions of that bill have since become law.

Our witnesses today will address renewable energy technology – a crucial part of the solution to today's challenges. Renewable energies such as wind, solar, biomass and geothermal must continue to grow to represent a larger share of the world's energy supply. To sharpen the focus on renewable energy, I recently introduced bipartisan legislation with my colleague Rep. Ed Markey that would have the United States help create an International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA). This agency would work to "expand the availability and generating capacity of renewable energy to markets around the world in order to increase economic opportunity, drive technological innovation, enhance regional and global security, raise living standards, and reduce global warming pollution."

In the past, the U.S. has helped with the creation of other international energy agencies, but none of them focuses primarily on renewable energy. To ensure a healthy and safe environment for today and tomorrow we must continue to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and promote 21st century clean energy solutions.

Given rising sea levels, the increasing severity of storm surges, and higher temperatures the world over, the impact of global climate change is undeniable. Unless we act now, we will see greater and greater threats to our way of life on this planet.

I'm looking forward to the testimony of our witnesses today, and look forward to working together to find further solutions to the complex relationship between energy needs and environmental responsibility.