



THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY INDEPENDENCE AND GLOBAL WARMING

**Opening Statement for Chairman Edward J. Markey
Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming
“Fire and Rain: How the Destruction of Tropical Forests is Fueling Climate Change”
February 14, 2008**

When the Speaker created the Select Committee, she charged us to help educate the Congress and the public on the important issues of global warming and energy independence. I don't think she envisioned us literally bringing our work to the Senate, but we are glad to be here this afternoon.

Over the last year, the Select Committee has examined a variety of ways to reduce global warming pollution from the burning of fossil fuels. Whether it is capturing the carbon dioxide from coal, generating electricity from new wind turbines, increasing the efficiency of cars or filling fuel tanks with *grassoline*, Congress has engaged in robust policy discussions.

Today we will examine a source of global warming pollution that has been relatively neglected on Capitol Hill – the destruction of tropical forests. When forests are cut down or burned they release the carbon stored within them. Twenty percent of global emissions of heat-trapping gases comes from cutting down forests. For many countries in the developing world, their contributions to global warming are almost entirely due to the loss of their forests. To find a global solution to global warming – one that involves all major emitters and all major sources – the emissions from the destruction of forests cannot be ignored.

More than just a source of global warming pollution, forests are a critical component of a safe climate. Covering an area approximately the size of the continental United States, the Amazon is the world's largest remaining expanse of tropical forest and fittingly described as the “lungs of the planet.” It contributes to rainfall well beyond its borders, and with 20 percent of the world's freshwater flowing through it to the sea, the Amazon influences ocean currents that are themselves crucial regulators of the climate. Because of this role, conserving the Amazon forest becomes necessary to prevent catastrophic climate change for more reasons than just the carbon locked away in it.

But global warming is already having an impact on the Amazon and other tropical forests. Scientists have recently exposed the fingerprints of global warming on the devastating drought the Amazon experienced in 2005. Climate models predict an increasing risk of drought and fire and even the transformation of the rainforest to savanna if global warming continues unchecked. So in order to protect the Amazon, we also need to adopt policies that protect our planet.

The agreement in Bali this past December was a step forward in this regard. For the first time, developing world countries agreed to negotiate actions they would take to control emissions as part of an international climate agreement and climate negotiators agreed to consider policies that conserve forests -- and thus avoid emissions from their destruction - within future international climate agreements. These two developments open the door to achieving a truly comprehensive and effective agreement that will protect people and the planet.

It is time for the Congress to re-establish America's position in the fight against global warming as a leader, not a laggard. When the Brazilians and citizens of other tropical forest nations look up in the sky, they see red, white and blue CO₂. The United States alone is responsible for over a quarter of the carbon dioxide increase in the atmosphere over the last 150 years. Now we must take actions to reduce our own global warming pollution and work with countries around the world to develop policies that provide a competitive value for intact forests against other uses of the land.

There are many questions for Congress to consider when incorporating forest conservation into climate legislation. Our panel today will help the Select Committee begin sorting through these crucial issues, and I look forward to their testimony.