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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Washington, DC 20515-6115

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October 3, 2007

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M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Members, Committee on Energy and Commerce

FROM: John D. Dingell, Chairman 
Committee on Energy and Commerce

Rick Boucher, Chairman 
Subcommittee on Energy and Air Quality

SUBJECT: Climate Change White Papers

Throughout 2007 the Subcommittee on Energy and Air Quality has focused on two issues of great interest to the American public: energy independence and climate change. We began the year with an intensive set of hearings devoted to an examination of global climate change including its causes, pace, and potential effect on the environment and on the American economy. We then moved to the development of policies to enhance our energy security. We held 17 hearings on these topics from January to June, and in July the subcommittee and full committee produced six bills.

The energy legislation reported by the Committee and passed by the House is expected to save more than 10 billion cumulative tons of CO₂ through 2030 once enacted and fully funded. While this is an impressive achievement, it represents but one necessary component of a comprehensive climate change program. With efforts now underway to reconcile the differences between the House and Senate-passed energy bills, we are now renewing our intensive focus on climate change.

Today we are releasing the first in a series of climate change white papers. The purpose of this effort is to focus the discussion in the Committee as we move towards the development and eventual passage of comprehensive climate change legislation. It is worth noting that while the use of white papers is not a policy-making tool frequently employed by the Committee, this topic in its scope and complexity is unlike any we have confronted and time is of the essence. Leading scientists around the world agree that aggressive action must be taken to stabilize and

then sharply reduce our emissions of greenhouse gases, and that these actions must be taken soon. We believe that white papers will hasten our efforts by focusing attention on specific design elements of a mandatory greenhouse gas control policy in a manner that ensures the quality of our work and promotes a broad consensus among interested parties.

There are many policy options available to address climate change. One is the use of carbon fees, or taxes, to establish a price on greenhouse gas emissions and thereby limit their proliferation. Other options include a rapid and substantial increase in climate research and technological development. While these are valuable tools, they do not fall under the province of the Committee and will therefore not be the focus of these papers.

Our goal is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions between 60 percent and 80 percent by 2050. This is an ambitious target and one that we believe is best achieved with a cap and trade system as the cornerstone of national policy. The white paper being released today discusses the overall benefits of a cap-and-trade system and suggests the sectors of the economy that should be included. It also raises a number of important points for discussion regarding policy details. Subsequent white papers will address other topics, including, but not limited to: cap levels and timetables; costs containment mechanisms; carbon sequestration; offsets and credits; the role and obligations of developing countries; and the distribution of emissions allowances.

The white papers will contain a mixture of recommendations and issues for further discussion. We welcome the views of every member of the Committee, as well as those of affected industries and other stakeholders. We anticipate holding hearings on several of the topics raised by the white papers in order to receive detailed, constructive suggestions that may be used to craft legislative language.

If you have questions please do not hesitate to contact us directly or Bruce Harris, Lorie Schmidt, Sue Sheridan, or Laura Vaught with the Committee staff at ext. 5-2927.