

By Rep. Steve King

The House Agriculture Committee concluded its first public hearing to review the Waxman-Markey climate change and energy bill (H.R. 2454) on June 11. Dubbed “cap and trade,” it would impose new energy taxes on all American energy users, raising the cost of all energy, for the purpose of bringing down energy consumption in order to reduce “global warming” emissions.

Their proposal would set a limit on how much carbon dioxide a company or farm could emit as part of its production process. Any company exceeding the government-mandated limit would be forced to purchase emissions allowances from other companies that do not exceed the limit.

The June 11 hearing was the first time the Agriculture Committee had the opportunity to examine the impact this bill will have on production agriculture and rural America . Unfortunately, this may have been the only time. Speaker Nancy Pelosi and liberal leaders on Capitol Hill are attempting to muscle the bill through Congress before the summer ends.

It is important to note that there were three witness panels during this hearing, including former Iowa Governor and current Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack. Other witness included representatives from conservation, energy and agriculture-related organizations such as the American Farm Bureau Federation.

Secretary Vilsack said he supported “the notion that there’s obviously work yet to be done on this bill.” But Secretary Vilsack also supports “the notion” of the predictions of a climate catastrophe and “the notion” of taxing energy users and claiming a positive economic impact even while acknowledging increased costs to agriculture.

Even worse, Secretary Vilsack admitted that the USDA had not completed any analysis of how this bill will impact farmers and ranchers, but he admitted that “it is fair to say there may be additional costs associated with a farming operation.” Vilsack described the bill as a “work in progress.”

Vilsack’s position on “cap and trade” hurts Iowa and American agriculture. I have never seen a Secretary of Agriculture so at odds with both Democrats and Republicans on the Agriculture Committee.

A thousand-page bill of this magnitude deserves thoughtful consideration and debate. Yet, we have Speaker Pelosi ignoring the legislative process and trying to force what Secretary Vilsack calls a “work in progress” through Congress. Liberals like the idea of giving the government more control over our economy, but their “cap and trade” plan is nothing more than a national energy tax that will punish job creators and hurt economic growth. A more appropriate title for this bill is “cap and tax” because of the new national energy taxes it would impose.

From higher energy costs to lost jobs to higher food prices, cap-and-trade promises to cap our incomes, our livelihoods and our standard of living, while it trades away American jobs and opportunities. Even some Democrats are worried about the effects of a “cap and trade” bill.

Michigan Democrat John Dingell, the longest serving Representative in the House, voiced his concerns with “cap and trade” legislation. Dingell stated that “nobody in this country realizes that cap and trade is a tax, and it’s a great big one.” Dingell recognizes that this plan will lead to more taxes, fewer jobs and more government intrusion.

Agriculture is a prime target of this bill because our agriculture is energy intensive. The Heritage Foundation recently released an economic study on how cap-and-trade will impact farmers. That study revealed that by 2035, the average net income for farmers will decrease by 57 percent. No wonder 100 agriculture and food groups have expressed opposition to the bill with more groups joining in opposition every day. They understand that this legislation will destroy our livelihoods.

How can a new tax increase profits for those paying the tax? I will continually work to kill “cap and trade” legislation. Tom Vilsack and other global warming alarmists are wrong on the science and completely wrong on the economics.