(Washington, DC) - **Congressman Wally Herger (R-CA), a Member of the House Ways and Means Committee, released the following transcript of a hearing held last week regarding climate change. Though the Ways and Means Committee has jurisdiction over tax, trade and health policy, the chairman of the committee called this hearing to engage in a scientific discussion of the objectives that climate change legislation should seek to accomplish. Congressman Herger questioned Dr. Brenda Ekwurzel of the Union of Concerned Scientists, one of the witnesses, as to whether forest management to thin excess growth should play a role in decreasing greenhouse gas emissions through decreased wildfire risk and increased carbon sequestration.**

The Northern California area continues to remain subject to increasingly catastrophic wildfire due to an overabundance of forest growth. These fires emit million of tons of greenhouse gases each year, on a scale that overshadows almost any other single emissions source. Congressman Herger has long advocated responsible forest management as a method to reduce this risk and provide material for a variety of uses, including renewable biomass power. Dr. Ekwurzel, whose organization has opposed commonsense forest management, attempted to sidestep the intent of my question but she did allude to the fact that forest management could reduce the size and intensity of these fires. An excerpt of the exchange appears below. To read the full transcript, please click here .

Congressman Herger: "Dr. Ekwurzel, I represent a rural Northern California district that has nine national forests at high risk for wildfires and has experienced a number of severe fires in the past year. It's my understanding that wildfires emit an average of 105 million tons of greenhouse gases every year. Putting this number in perspective -- it's about 40% more than the total emissions of all of the cars in the state of California… Excess growth could be removed from the forests, thus reducing emissions from fires, and used to produce renewable, carbon-neutral biomass energy. Would you and your organization agree that one part of our effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions should be responsible forest management to thin excess growth?

If the risks of climate change are as severe as you have stated today, would you agree that the Committee should consider incentives for the production of clean energy from excess forest biomass?

Dr. Brenda Ekwurzel: "Thank you. You bring up a very important feedback mechanism that is

amplifying global warming… What they have found is that when we have global warming amplifying the drying out of the soils in these high alpine systems, that by the time you get to the end of the summer, if there's a lightning strike, you can start a fire naturally. But the extent of the damage can be quite immense and without that managed forest system, these are natural systems, so we're seeing the global warming making it more likely that we are turning our forests into tinderbox and sending that precious stored carbon back into the air making it harder for us. So this is another mechanism in addition to the ocean slowing down its absorption of carbon dioxide that it's getting harder for us to manage this system that we have unleashed by our excess carbon dioxide…"

Ekwurzel: "I'm not a forest manager, but I do understand that very smart forest management of systems that do adapt to climate change that is happening would be prudent. But also we need to do mitigation of the climate change itself so that all of our good effort to preserve the forest doesn't go up in smoke…"