

Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Energy
Hearing on “Discussion Draft, Energy Star Reform Act of 2017 and H.R.
3477, the Ceiling Fan Energy Conservation Harmonization Act”
November 7, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

Our committee’s energy focus is not limited to energy production and delivery – we are also very interested in policies that promote energy efficiency. Doing more with less is always a win for consumers, for manufacturers, for jobs, the environment, and for the economy overall.

H.R. 3477, the Ceiling Fan Energy Conservation Harmonization Act, authored by my good friend from North Carolina, Mr. Hudson, is one of the two bills we’re examining today. The legislation would align the compliance date of the next efficiency standard for ceiling fans with the compliance date for ceiling fan lights, so that manufacturers can deal with both at the same time.

Shifting gears, I believe that the Energy Star program is a nice complement to the mandatory federal efficiency standards for many energy-using products in that it helps consumers identify those models that go above and beyond these minimum standards. Surveys show that consumers are aware of the Energy Star label and that many of them look for it when making their purchasing decisions. In addition to appliances, Energy Star also helps building owners and renters save on energy.

The Energy Star program received a great deal of attention earlier this year when the administration’s FY2018 budget proposed to zero out the program. I certainly disagree with this approach, but I do believe that the program could be improved upon and now is a great time to kick off that dialogue. Today’s hearing will focus on our discussion draft of Energy Star reforms. Keep in mind that this is just a draft – we welcome constructive criticisms of what it contains as well as suggestions for things we should add to it.

One of the quirks with the Energy Star program is that it has no permanent lead agency. Each new administration can decide how to divide responsibilities between DOE and EPA, and in 2009 the Obama administration shifted the lead to EPA. In my mind, Energy Star is fundamentally an energy program and belongs at DOE, but I understand that many participants in the program are happy with EPA. The discussion draft proposes to make DOE the lead agency while still giving EPA an important role, but again I stress that this is just a discussion draft and I welcome all comments on how the program should be structured.

As I mentioned, Energy Star is a well-functioning program overall, but there are areas for improvement. The discussion draft addresses some of these, such as protections against unhelpful class action litigation as well as assurances that companies have a chance to comment on major actions under the program. It also has provisions to that help safeguard consumer choice.

I'd also like to note that thoughtful legislating often takes time. This is the first – of what I'm sure will be several – hearings and markups on the legislation. Today's hearing is focused on a discussion draft that has yet to be formally introduced and I'm looking forward to receiving feedback from all stakeholders – including EPA and DOE – as we continue to move through the legislative process.

As we discuss potential changes to the program, we cannot lose sight that consumers are the reason for Energy Star and that the focus should always be on them. Any idea that improves the process by which consumers get the information they can use to save on their energy bills is something we would like to hear about. I thank the witnesses for their participation in this hearing.