

Opening Statement of the Honorable Michael C. Burgess, M.D.
Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade,
Subcommittee on Energy and Power
“Midterm Review and Update on the Corporate Average Fuel Economy Program and
Greenhouse Gas Emissions Standards For Motor Vehicles”
September 22, 2016

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Congress established the Corporate Average Fuel Economy program in 1975 to improve vehicle fuel economy, reduce oil consumption, and secure the nation’s energy independence. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration was tasked with overseeing the program and empowered to set fuel economy standards for cars and trucks sold in the United States.

Since the establishment of CAFE, the program has undergone significant modifications and revisions. Some changes were driven by fluctuating economic conditions and projected marketplace activity. Advancements in automotive technology have also played a part. And still other changes have been driven by political winds. Layer on top of that NHTSA, EPA and the states all setting up their own programs and you have one very complicated regulatory scheme.

As we gather today to discuss CAFE, greenhouse gas emissions, and the Midterm Review, I have serious concerns about the real-world impact that NHTSA’s augural standards for model year 2022 to 2025 vehicles will have on the economy, the health of the auto industry, and consumer welfare.

I believe in fuel efficiency, and energy independence. But I also believe in policy that is based on real world data, and consumer choice. In Texas, we have big spaces and we like to get around those big spaces in our big cars. And technology and gas prices let us do that pretty easily.

I believe so strongly in the power of efficiency, in fact, that I hold an annual Energy Efficiency Summit in my district every July, when historically fuel and electricity prices skyrocket in a state like Texas, where temperatures exceed 100 degrees consistently through the summer.

However, as strongly as I feel about energy efficiency, I feel equally as strongly that government should not be in the business of telling consumers what they can and cannot purchase. The issue of a product’s efficiency, whether it be a lightbulb or a motor vehicle, should be solely between the company and the customer. For this reason, I introduced H.R. 4504, the Energy Efficiency Free Market Act, to repeal the Department of Energy’s authority to mandate efficiency standards of consumer products.

This is not to say I don’t believe in purchasing the most efficient products possible. I drive a hybrid. When I built my house, I made sure the products we used were the most efficient we could obtain. But those were my choices. The government wasn’t and shouldn’t have been part of those decisions.

What I don’t want to see is government regulations and overly prescriptive mandates taking away consumer choice and putting a real hurt on the family budget.

The auto industry is one of the few bright spots of our economy. It creates millions of jobs and drives productivity, innovation, and economic growth. It also allows for investments into life-saving technologies that make our roadways safer and more secure for the driving public.

I am deeply concerned that the planned fuel economy standards for future model years will significantly stall that progress and dramatically reduce consumer choice. I am concerned that in some cases it could even push consumers into less safe cars, either because they have to buy used or because they can't afford the newest CAFE technology and the newest safety technologies.

At a time of persistent economic uncertainty facing hardworking American families, we have a responsibility to ensure that does not happen. In that vein, I look forward to discussing the assumptions that NHTSA and EPA are looking at as they require ever increasing fuel efficiency standards and how they further NHTSA's core mission in providing safe and secure vehicular travel for the American people.

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