

Statement of Chairman John Shimkus
Subcommittee on Environment
Hearing on “Sharing the Road: Policy Implications of Electric and
Conventional Vehicles in the Years Ahead.”
May 8, 2018

(As prepared for delivery)

As most of you know, this is the Environment Subcommittee’s third hearing over the last two months dealing with fuels and vehicles. Our first hearing provided an overview of the future of personal transportation, and I believe there were two key takeaways – one, that the internal combustion engine running on petroleum and plant-based liquid fuels will remain the major player in the decades ahead, and – two, that battery electric vehicles will continue to make inroads in the marketplace.

Our next hearing expanded on the first point, specifically that since the internal combustion engine and liquid fuels are going to be around for a while, we should consider new ideas for improving them, namely a High-Octane Fuel Standard matched with vehicles whose engines are optimized to run on these fuels. Ideally, a range of higher-octane fuel blends could lead to as much, if not more ethanol use than under the RFS, while giving vehicles significantly improved performance and fuel economy.

Today, we focus on the second point, that battery electric vehicles (EVs) are gaining in market share, and that the internal combustion engine has significant competition for the first-time in a long-time. This hearing will delve into the question of what these changes mean for everyone involved in fuels and vehicles, and most importantly what they mean for consumers. I thank our diverse panel for being here today and providing a variety of perspectives.

I should add that we are focusing on EVs and not on other alternative vehicles, like natural gas vehicles or fuel cells for example, mainly because projections from the Energy Information Administration see EVs as the fastest growing alternative. Of course, only time will tell which vehicle types will catch on.

When we think of larger EV fleets, one of the first questions that comes to mind is where all the extra electricity is going to come from to power them. After all, EVs are not going to be a good deal for consumers if the electricity is expensive. I’m certain we will hear from several witnesses on this point, but I would like to add

that I believe coal-fired generation will have an important role in providing affordable electricity and making an EV future work.

Fueling infrastructure is also an issue. We currently have 150,000 liquid fuel retailers along our nation's roads and highways, and you can fill up in about 5 minutes. It is hard for EVs to compete with that level of convenience, so charging infrastructure and charging times are still a challenge.

As the nation's vehicle mix changes, we may need to rethink past fuel and vehicle policies. For example, the Renewable Fuel Standard was last amended back in 2007 when we assumed that gasoline demand was on a one-way trip higher. We now know that those assumptions were overstated and will be even more so if EVs continue to gain market share. This doesn't necessarily mean the RFS needs to be amended in light of EVs, but Congress should at least look at the matter.

Automobiles are the second biggest family expense after a home, so the stakes are high. I look forward to a thorough discussion, and again thank our witnesses.