

Statement of Chairman John Shimkus
Subcommittee on Environment
The Future of Transportation Fuels and Vehicles
March 7, 2018

(As prepared for delivery)

We have experienced very gradual and incremental change in transportation fuels and vehicles over the last several decades, but there are signs that the pace of change will accelerate in the years ahead. In the not-too-distant future we may see cars in showrooms and fuel choices at retail stations that are noticeably different than what is available today. The purpose of this hearing is to provide an overview of this ongoing transition and learn more about what it all means for the American driving public.

I welcome our distinguished panel of experts. While nobody's crystal ball is perfect, the individuals and organizations represented here have done some of the best thinking about the future of personal transportation, and I thank them for their participation at this hearing.

Many factors are contributing to this evolving marketplace in transportation. One driver (no pun intended) is government policy. I should stress that this is not a hearing about the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) per se, or Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards, or incentives for electric vehicles. However, these and other federal policies are significant contributors to the changing fuels and vehicles marketplace and thus are an important part of the overall discussion.

For example, the Department of Energy is working with other agencies and national labs on its Co-Optima program to achieve breakthroughs in high octane fuels used in high compression engines. The program's goal is to cost-effectively boost efficiency from internal combustion engines and in so doing help reach and possibly exceed the targets in both the RFS and CAFE. I look forward to hearing from Dr. Farrell on this and other research for which the National Renewable Energy Laboratory is a contributor.

But policy-driven change is only part of the picture. We are also seeing technological advances, whether it is getting EVs closer to the point where they make economic sense for more people, further progress on natural gas-powered vehicles that can take advantage of our domestic natural gas abundance, continued improvements in fuel cells, or other avenues of research. And for every alternative vehicle breakthrough, there are alternative fueling infrastructure challenges for which solutions are being developed.

I might add that today's discussion is not just about alternative fuels and vehicles. Research is also underway to improve the efficiency of the internal combustion engine and help it remain a cost-effective choice in the decades ahead. I mentioned Co-Optima and its integrated approach to higher octane fuels and internal combustion engines that are optimized for them, but other research is also achieving breakthroughs in getting more efficiency out of this conventional technology.

I should also note that advances in autonomous vehicles, including passage of the SELF DRIVE Act, have been the subject of a lot of good work by the Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection Subcommittee and Chairman Latta. Autonomous vehicles will also have an effect on the choice of fuels and vehicles that will be used in the future. It's all related, so we need to be mindful of everything going on in transportation research.

Of course, many factors are behind these transitions. Environmental considerations are certainly a factor, energy security is also a factor, but we can't lose sight of the most important thing and that is the impact on the consumer. We want to make owning, operating, and using a vehicle as affordable as possible for the American people, and I hope that this research helps in that regard.

In any event, change is happening in the transportation sector, and I hope that today's hearing gives us all a better understanding of it. Thank you.