

Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Environment
“Discussion Draft: The 21st Century Transportation Fuels Act”
December 11, 2018
As prepared for delivery

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for recognizing me for an opening statement.

I congratulate you and Mr. Flores on the recent release of your Discussion Draft, the topic of our hearing today. I appreciate the seriousness that you have brought to this matter; and I am glad you have followed through on your promise to push toward a legislative solution rather than let the traditional parties on this issue comfortably sit in their foxholes in perpetuity. It is one of the reasons why this hearing today is so important.

This draft did not happen overnight.

I want to acknowledge and commend the countless hours both you and Mr. Flores, and your staffs, have spent trying to figure out what makes sense for our nation’s transportation fuel mix. As you have already said, Mr. Chairman, over the past two years, this subcommittee has held three round table discussions to educate members and another five hearings – today making six – to fine tune the committee’s understanding of a range of issues related to liquid fuels and the motor vehicles powered by them.

Throughout this process, I have been struck by the acknowledgement that liquid fuel powered motor vehicles are expected to be the dominant type of vehicle used by Americans for decades to come and that no one knows what is going to happen regarding our nation’s renewable fuel mix beginning in 2023, which is why this draft is so important. By transitioning to higher octane fuel blends and vehicles – whose engines are designed to maximize fuel efficiency, we can both incorporate more renewable liquid fuels into the fuel supply while also increasing miles per gallon for consumers.

I am pleased the Discussion Draft includes provisions I strongly support – especially the one which removes the gross inequity in federal fuel policy regarding wood and forest management so that woody biomass can play a larger role in the RFS program; but as the chairman stated, this draft is not a final product. Getting the policy right isn’t always easy, especially with complex and sometimes contentious issues like the Renewable Fuel Standard and vehicle fuel

economy standards. Like any major legislation just starting out, it needs additional refinement. I am interested in learning from stakeholder expertise about what necessary refinements are needed for this bill and to hear about any important items that are not contained in it, but they believe should be.

I am most concerned about what makes sense for the interests of consumers, especially as it relates to access to, pricing for, and the availability and quality of the engines and fuels that consumers demand or that federal legislation requires. These are issues that were tangentially discussed in our hearings, but I feel can only be appropriately honed when people are evaluating a concrete proposal and providing feedback about the best way to accomplish these goals. To me, the bottom line is that new fuels and vehicles must first and foremost deliver benefits to consumers while improving our environment.

I know some folks will want to discuss electric vehicles in conjunction with this bill. As a hybrid driver on both coasts, I am certainly interested in hearing more on this subject, but liquid fuels for motor vehicles and the looming questions arising in 2023 make the most sense to tackle right now. As I said at our third hearing, as things stand right now, I have great concerns about the viability of EV's in meeting the needs of rural America, not to mention range and price issues that make EVs unrealistic for many Americans today, even as new innovations make their use more and more reasonable for many in our urban and suburban areas.

I want to welcome our many witnesses and those who chose to send the committee their comments to be included in the record. I look forward to learning from stakeholder expertise about how to improve this bill. Further, since we want discussion, I encourage you to be forthright, but constructive about these proposals. I know some interests have chosen either to be hyper-critical or not to offer suggestions, but recognizing time is short for addressing this issue in a timely manner, I think they do so at the peril of their members.

Thank you, again, Mr. Chairman, for this time. I yield back whatever remaining time I might have.