

Opening Statement By
Ranking Member Brad Miller
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Hearing on Hitting the Ethanol Blend Wall: Examining the Science on E15
U.S. House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Subcommittee on Energy and Environment

Thank you, Chairman Harris, for the opportunity to hear about current policies regarding renewable fuels and E15. Renewable fuel from biomass, specifically corn-based ethanol, is a complex and controversial issue. And, as this panel demonstrates, there exists a vast array of interests and opinions regarding the ethanol content of our nation's fuel supply.

I understand that this hearing was supposed to examine the science and testing EPA used in its decision to allow introduction of E15 in the market. We may not all agree with the EPA's decision, but we should be interested in learning more about the underlying science as well as the range of positive and negative effects this decision may have. Unfortunately, given the lopsided panel and sprawling focus of this hearing, I am concerned that we will leave here only slightly more informed about the science around E15, and no closer to agreement on what steps, if any, the Congress should take.

Just as we expect the Executive Branch to work in an efficient, transparent, manner, we should also have a clear picture of what we are trying to accomplish with our Committee actions. Sadly, since being notified about this hearing, and up until the end of last week, we have seen everything from the purpose and scope of the hearing to the selection of the witnesses broaden and change. I anticipate critical gaps in the Committee's record on the subject.

Much of the science EPA used in making its waiver decision was conducted by the Department of Energy. In fact, DOE's role is the only piece of this issue firmly within this Committee's jurisdiction. But unfortunately the Majority did not invite DOE to the Subcommittee today to testify. I do not see how we get a clear picture of the science if we do not have DOE here to discuss the extensive testing they conducted.

With seven witnesses on one panel – surpassed this Congress only by an 8-person panel, half of which were children - I would expect to hear a wide variety of perspectives on ethanol. Unfortunately with such a crowded and diverse panel, and such little time for discussion, it will be difficult for members and witnesses to examine the issue in detail. Furthermore, despite the size of this panel, we are still missing some critical stakeholders. The motives for not inviting the ethanol industry are clear, and made even clearer by instead inviting the oil industry to testify. I find it hard to accept that we will get a balanced view on the E15 waiver controversy without testimony from either the ethanol industry or the Department of Energy.

Furthermore, just last Thursday the witnesses, along with the Minority, received draft legislation on which they were instructed to testify. Granted, the draft is neither particularly complex nor ambitious. But, in my opinion, this was hardly enough time for witnesses to thoroughly review the material in advance of their deadlines to submit testimony, especially given the holiday.

Additionally, within the last few weeks the Vice-Chairman of the Full Committee, Mr. Sensenbrenner, has sent letters to the automotive and small engine industry from the Committee on the issue of E15. The Minority only received the responses to these letters two days ago. Then, on Tuesday of this week Mr. Sensenbrenner sent a letter to the EPA asking several questions about E15 and setting a deadline of July 22nd for EPA to respond.

Mr. Chairman, if our task is to conduct thorough oversight then I would have expected us to wait to hear back from EPA before holding a hearing, and certainly before we ask witnesses and Members to review legislation.

I fear that the Majority has already drawn its conclusions on the subject without considering EPA's responses, and that this hearing is merely a formality in building a legislative record on a bill that may not even be within our jurisdiction.

If the take-away message from this hearing is that EPA is making policy prematurely, based on incomplete data, and without considering the range of important stakeholder perspectives, then I must point out the irony in how this hearing and the proposed legislation have been developed.

Opposition and support of ethanol certainly crosses party lines, but I cannot help but see this hearing as part of the coordinated partisan attack on clean energy.

Clean and sustainable renewable fuels are already a part of our economy, and we need to work towards realizing a future of producing home grown renewable fuels. In this grand challenge, it is this Committee's task to focus on the science and technology. That is why I have invited Mr. Burke from North Carolina to testify today. He will provide a different perspective from the rest of the panel on renewable fuels and discuss how science and technology will help our country get on the road to a sustainable energy future.

With that, I look forward to all of the witness's testimony, and to what I hope will be an extended discussion about the scientific and technological implications of our continued migration from oil to alternative fuels. Thank you.