

Opening Statement By Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici
February 26, 2013
Hearing on Mid-Level Ethanol Blends:
Consumer and Technical Research Needs

U.S. House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Subcommittee on Environment

Thank you, Chairman Harris. Renewable fuel from biomass, specifically corn-based ethanol, is a complex issue. And, as this hearing demonstrates, the ethanol content in our nation's fuel supply has been the subject of much debate.

In this committee we often cover policy areas about which there is disagreement in basic ideology and worldview. But when we are faced with issues on which there is agreement, we should recognize that and work toward consensus solutions. For example, the Renewable Fuels Standard was first included in an energy bill that passed the House and Senate with bipartisan support. That is a statement we don't say frequently enough.

One thing that many of us do say frequently is that we need to put this nation on a path toward energy independence. Our reliance on foreign oil causes concerns in every sector. Businesses and consumers worry about constantly fluctuating prices at the pump. Our Generals see a strategic disadvantage to relying on resources provided by countries with which we have experienced significant conflict. And many of our constituents rightly worry that continuing our current use of fossil fuels will harm our fragile environment.

The Renewable Fuels Standard (RFS) represents a bipartisan acknowledgment of the role that alternative fuels play in reducing our dependence on foreign oil. From my time in the Oregon legislature I know the concerns that some have about blend levels in gasoline, and I know that various states have made exceptions to accommodate these concerns. It makes sense to fully understand the impacts of our renewable policies before requiring consumers to comply. What does *not* make sense, however, is refusing to address the problem altogether. The "blend wall" should not be a reason to give up on renewable fuels; it should be a reason to promote technology that will meet the growing supply of renewables. Advanced ethanol, cellulosic biomass, developments in these fuels are only going to increase the supply of blended fuels on the market. Those advancements will help bring us further toward energy security.

This hearing is supposed to examine -among other things- scientific, technical, and consumer impacts of EPA's decision to allow introduction of E15 in the market. And we will also take comments on a draft bill that Mr. Sensenbrenner is circulating that would prevent the EPA from complying with its Congressionally-mandated responsibilities under the Clean Air Act until additional research is performed on E15.

The Department of Energy conducted much of the science that the EPA used in making its waiver decision. Although I agree that the EPA should not base decisions on incomplete information, neither should this Committee. I am concerned that, in the Hearing Charter and in the witness testimony, the main literature that is being used to refute the EPA's science on E15 is being provided by a group that is largely financed by the American Petroleum Institute and several automobile manufacturers. In a committee where science is paramount, I find it perplexing that the scientific studies we are discussing were largely funded by the oil industry, which has an obvious financial stake in the outcome of this debate.

Also, because the Department of Energy conducted the research on which the EPA based its decision, it is important to note for the record that the Majority invited neither the Department of Energy nor the Environmental Protection Agency to discuss the science and extensive testing on which EPA based its decision.

Clean and sustainable renewable fuels are already a part of our economy. Investing in clean and renewable energy has and will continue to create jobs, reduce our impact on climate change, reduce our reliance on foreign fossil fuels, and strengthen our national security. We should work toward realizing a future of producing home-grown renewable fuels. To meet that challenge, it is this Committee's responsibility to focus on the science and technology that will help get our country 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 a productive discussion about the scientific and technological implications of alternative fuels.