

Chairman Dingell at the Subcommittee on Energy and Air Quality hearing entitled, "Climate Change and Energy Security: Views from the Automobile Industry"

Statement of Congressman John D. Dingell, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND AIR QUALITY
HEARING ENTITLED "CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY SECURITY:
VIEWS FROM THE AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY"
March 14, 2004

Thank you for calling this important hearing. Today the Committee continues its examination of global climate change. We have before us representatives from the five most significant participants in the automobile industry in the United States. I look forward to hearing their views on this pressing and immediate concern for the Congress.

The role the automobile industry plays in our Nation's economy is considerable. In my State of Michigan, General Motors Corporation, Ford Motor Company, and Chrysler Group hold a vital place in the economy and the community. The industry's impact extends beyond my State's borders. Light vehicle sale and production comprise nearly 4 percent of the Gross Domestic Product for the Nation, and according to a recent study, the automobile industry generates roughly 13.3 million private sector jobs across the country.

The contribution of the transportation sector, particularly light duty passenger vehicles, to greenhouse gas emissions is significant. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, approximately 16 percent of greenhouse gas emissions are attributed to passenger cars. As this Committee takes action to address climate change, the Committee must consider these emissions in addition to other large greenhouse contributors.

The discussion of how best to address the environmental and economic impacts of automobile emissions is not a new one. Ever since this Committee authorized the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to set Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards in 1975, industry representatives, environmental advocates, and policy makers have grappled with the issue of how regulatory regimes could be reformed and implemented to improve the efficiency of passenger vehicles. This debate has taken place in numerous contexts. Over the years, proponents of reform have discussed raising, lowering, or reforming CAFE standards. Energy conservation, consumer protection, economic growth, oil independence, and as recently as last Congress, rising gas prices at the pump, have all fueled these debates.

This year, the Committee has undertaken an inquiry into an issue that is arguably more critical than, though not unrelated to, any of the above issues. Scientists have been telling us for years that greenhouse gas emissions from human activity are contributing to warming the planet, and the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report expressed little doubt that this conclusion is a justifiable one. I would urge both the Members of this Committee and the witnesses before us not to take this issue lightly. It should cause all to reevaluate their approach to energy policy in the transportation sector and the economy as a whole.

Ladies and Gentleman, Hannibal is at the gates. The old debate is no longer sufficient. It is time to stop emphasizing what is wrong and what will not work. We need to talk about what can be done, and what can work. This should no longer be a political discussion; the time has come for us to discuss policy. I want to hear from our witnesses about their ideas to address climate change, and I want to hear what they think about the various policy proposals we have already seen.

It is my hope that our hearing will be productive rather than divisive, and that we see a genuine commitment on both sides of the aisle and on both sides of the dais to generate an effective and workable solution. We cannot delay, but nor should we rush flawed approaches without hearing from every group involved. Indeed, every industry, including those in the transportation sector, will have to contribute to the solution. I will take heed of what I hear today, and I would urge my fellow Committee Members to do the same. Thank you.

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