

U.S. House of Representatives

Select Committee on

Energy Independence and Global Warming

F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr., Ranking Republican

News Advisory

For Immediate Release

July 12, 2007

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Despite Promise, Plug-In Hybrids Need Technological Breakthroughs

Sensenbrenner: Markets, Not Congress, Should Decide Winners

Washington, D.C., July 12 – U.S. Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner, R-Wis., ranking Republican on the House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming, made the following statement during today’s hearing titled, “Plugging into Energy Independence with 150 MPG Vehicles:”

“Since the select committee’s inception in April, I’ve repeatedly stressed four principles that I and many Republicans believe must be part of any policy addressing global warming. First, I have said that any policy must produce tangible improvements to the environment. I also believe that any policy must protect the economy and include participation of all of the major industrialized countries, including China and India.

“Lastly, global warming policy must support and advance technological progress, because technology, not taxes and regulation, provide us with the best options to reduce U.S. dependency on foreign oil and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

“Between established technology like nuclear power, and fantastical solutions like fertilizing carbon-dioxide-eating plankton, the range of technology possibilities to address oil dependency and greenhouse gas emissions are fascinating.

“Researchers are racing to find new breakthrough technologies and improve existing ideas. And what better technology to win a race than a car? Hybrid-car technology is already in the marketplace and competing with the traditional gasoline-powered car. Recent news reports show that some hybrid cars have reached speeds over 100 miles per hour. Could this mean that the hum of the hybrid may replace the roar of the engine at the racetrack?

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“Plug-in hybrid cars hold even greater promise of reducing our reliance on foreign oil and our greenhouse gas emissions. Early indications suggest that if this technology were fully employed, it could reduce oil consumption by 6.5 million barrels a day and our greenhouse gas emissions by 27 percent, which is very promising indeed.

“So, will plug-in hybrid car technology be the winner of this race to free us from foreign oil and greenhouse gases? The answer is that I don’t know. And it shouldn’t be up to me, or any of my colleagues in Congress, to decide. Ultimately, it should be consumers who decide when they choose what products to buy. After all, with gas prices what they are, I doubt it would take a Congressional mandate to sell a car that gets 150 miles per gallon.

“Despite its promise, plug-in hybrid technology is expensive and it’s still unclear if it is effective on a mass scale. To be sure, it appears plug-in hybrid technology is still a breakthrough or two away from being parked in everyone’s driveway. Maybe we’ll see breakthroughs in hybrid technology, or perhaps there’s another technology that will move us beyond gasoline, such as biodiesel, hydrogen fuel cells or liquefied coal.

“Already, we’re seeing the private sector take an interest in plug-in hybrid technology. Last month, Internet giant Google announced it would partner with A123Systems to help fund research that could produce a much-needed breakthrough in battery durability. I am pleased that A123Systems President and CEO David Vieau is here to inform us about the research into this technology.

“On Monday, Ford Motors and Southern California Edison announced a joint initiative on plug-in hybrid research. That’s also good news. But while Ford Motors CEO Alan Mulally said plug-in hybrids could possibly be in showrooms in five to ten years, he made no firm predictions or promises. Like any smart business, Ford Motors is waiting to see if the technology develops before making the commitment.

“Congress should heed this example and be careful in its commitments, especially when it comes to funding research. Sure, there is promise in plug-in hybrid technology and I’m glad to see that the private sector is willing to fund research and development. But I caution my colleagues against believing technological breakthroughs are merely a result of money and funding. For nearly four decades, Congress devoted billions to nuclear fusion research, hoping for a breakthrough in energy production. So far, we’re still waiting for commercial results.

“We can’t afford to wait four decades for a breakthrough that will release us from our dependency on foreign oil. We now know that hybrids are fast, but the question is, will they be fast enough to win this technological race? I hope today’s hearing will help us begin to answer this question.”

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