

## Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Wyden

### Energy & Natural Resources Committee

May 14, 2013

Today, the Energy and Natural Resources Committee meets to hold the first of three forums- roundtables actually- that focus on natural gas. Anything and everything is on the table at these discussions if it advantages America's economy and its environmental needs.

Right now, natural gas is a strategic American asset. Right now we've got it and the rest of the world wants it. It is the cleanest of the fossil fuels so our goal here is to find ways to lock-in the advantages of the natural gas boom for a generation. I believe the best way to do that is to find creative answers to the difficult questions that otherwise might throw a monkey wrench into the American engine of potential progress. That includes demonstrating to concerned communities that gas production can be done safely and help shrink America's carbon footprint while it helps grow more job-paying opportunities for our people.

Now, after we scheduled this session my usual partner in my search for bipartisan approaches, Senator Murkowski, was needed to accompany the Secretary of State to the meeting of the Arctic Council Ministerial Session in Sweden, but we're very fortunate to have Senator Barrasso here and so we will be the bipartisan tandem when this program begins. When Senator Murkowski returns, you will hear her repeat as the two of us have done many times over the last several months that we come to these forums without any preconceived plans for what comes from these sessions. There is no preconceived plan, no piece of legislation that is going to be sprung on the unsuspecting at the conclusion of these, it isn't going to be about Kabuki theater. The point of these roundtables is to allow for freer discussion in a less structured environment in hopes that we can all learn from each other and promote cooperation across the political spectrum.

In addition, I want to make one note after studying your statements, and they were very helpful on that late plane last night from the West, we're up against a very challenging budget environment in this era of sequestration. So programs and what we call incentives in effect are facing reductions not expansions. So we are going to have to be particularly creative and nimble to figure out how to move the machinery of the federal government around so as to promote some of the attractive and interesting ideas that you are promoting today. Now I just want to touch very briefly on a couple of the substantive questions we are asking today- particularly transmission, transportation and innovation. On the transmission front, the question is how does America get natural gas from where it's produced to where it's needed. Our producers in this country are the "gold standard" for development, leading the rest of the world. Now America needs an infrastructure to match that. That doesn't just mean more pipelines; it means better pipelines. The Committee is lucky that today General Electric will tell us a little bit about their vision, for example, of an "Industrial Internet" that will allow us to link innovations in our information network to our pipeline network to maximize efficiency, reduce emissions and improve reliability.

The roundtable is also going to focus on emerging demand for natural gas, especially in the transportation sector. Resiliency, the ability to absorb shocks to the system from prices or otherwise, depends on diversity and natural gas offers an opportunity, along with renewable fuels, to continue to diversify the fuel mix of our transportation fleet. Today the Committee hosts an engine manufacturer, a truck manufacturer, a truck purchaser and an expert on places to fuel up. So let us try to nail down what barriers exist to wider adoption of natural gas vehicles and what can be done to surmount them.

Today, there are fewer than 600 natural gas fueling stations that are open to the public. Natural gas vehicles won't be a real alternative for consumers unless fueling stations are more widely available, but it doesn't make good business sense to open natural gas fueling stations if there aren't vehicles on the road to use them. I would very much like to have a nickel for every time someone talks about the chicken and the egg in connection with this discussion, but it is obvious that is a very real part in this equation.

Technology exists today to enable consumers to fuel up their natural gas vehicles at home using compressors, but they cost more than \$4,000 and currently take more than 8 hours to refuel a typical passenger vehicle. So the question here is what will it take to bring down the cost and speed up the fueling time to make home refueling a more attractive option to consumers?

And the final issue we are going to look at today is the role of innovation in developing new, commercially viable ways to use natural gas to reduce our nation's dependence on imported oil, reduce emissions and lower costs for consumers. Just as federal research played a key role in helping to launch the shale gas boom by funding development of directional drilling and fracking techniques to unlock previously uneconomic reserves, research can play a key role in bringing down the cost of natural gas vehicles, fueling and other alternative uses of the resource.

I'm looking forward to hearing the views of our panel today so that natural gas can make significant new contributions to strengthening our economy and improving the quality of our environment.