



Opening Statement
Oversight Hearing on Innovative Technologies Within the Automotive Industry
Chairman Lisa Murkowski
January 21, 2016

Good morning. We will call to order the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. This morning we have a hearing on the status of innovative technologies within the automotive industry.

The good news is that I don't have to drive a lot here in Washington, D.C. but I know there were a lot of people on the roads yesterday. They were wondering what the new advances are in the automotive and technology industries and how they're going to handle the snow.

We timed this hearing deliberately – not just to occur with our bipartisan energy bill which we're looking to take up at the first of next week on the Senate floor, but we're also here this morning because the Washington Auto Show is commencing. That show kicks off tomorrow, and while there is no substitute for going in person, we do have the CEO of the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, Mr. Bainwol, who is here to share his thoughts.

It isn't just the Auto Show that makes this hearing timely. Auto sales in the U.S. hit an all-time high in 2015, with 17.5 million cars and trucks sold. This banner year was spurred in part by low gas prices, and as we heard earlier this week, those prices are projected to remain low throughout the year.

Vehicle sales have also been boosted by the tremendous innovation taking place in the auto industry right now – and I think that's a story that deserves more attention.

We've seen dozens of alternative fuel models emerge, from electric vehicles like the Tesla Model S, to the fuel cell-powered Toyota Mirai, to a Ford F-150 that can run on compressed natural gas and propane.

At the same time, we have seen exciting developments in everything from safety technologies to self-driving cars, which may offer their own energy and environmental benefits.

I see today's hearing as an opportunity for us to learn more about significant innovation taking place in our auto industry – particularly as it relates to alternative fuels and lightweight materials, which are at the heart of the Department of Energy's research activities, and of our Committee's jurisdiction.

This is a "look down the road," if you will – a chance for us to hear about the technologies that are emerging, to gauge how they might affect our energy and mineral needs, and to understand the challenges that need to be overcome.

This hearing is also a chance for us to recognize that the auto industry is facing heavy regulations right now, particularly when it comes to fuel efficiency. And while those regulations are not within our

committee's jurisdiction, they do have an impact on our nation's fuel consumption, and are worth monitoring as we modernize our energy policies.

Another goal for this hearing is to examine whether federal programs meant to support innovation are working as intended – whether they are properly oriented to help our auto industry innovate, compete, and thrive. And that brings us to the work that the Department of Energy is doing, through its Vehicle Technologies Office and at the National Labs.

I have consistently advocated technology-neutral policies for the automotive sector. Instead of picking one favored technology, and plowing most or all of our limited federal research dollars into it, I am convinced the better path is to support research into a wider range of possible “winners” – and to let markets and consumers determine which is best.

Here in this Committee, I believe we are on a good track. As a result of our commitment to work together, our bipartisan energy bill includes several provisions to boost innovation in the automotive industry. That includes a modified version of the Vehicle Innovation Act which was sponsored by Senator Peters, Senator Alexander, and Senator Stabenow, which will provide the Department of Energy with a structured authority and clear direction for its research mission.

Our energy bill is bipartisan. We worked hard to make sure of that. And I think we can make sure our vehicle innovation policies are bipartisan, too.

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