

Opening Statement

The Honorable Michael M. Honda (D-CA)
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Energy
Committee on Science

Hearing: *Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicles: Legislation to Promote Research and Development*

May 17, 2006

I thank the Chairwoman for holding this important hearing today, and thank all of our witnesses for being here to share their expertise with us.

As you may know, I drive a Prius hybrid, and I've asked my poor staffer about hooking up a solar cell to keep the starting battery charged for those times when I've left the car at the airport for a few weeks. So I think it's fair to say that you can count me among the converted on this technology.

As gasoline prices have skyrocketed in recent weeks, there seems to be more sentiment among policymakers to support the development of more efficient vehicles.

Approximately 75 percent of the energy consumed in the transportation sector is provided by petroleum. Of that 75 percent, in 2004 nearly 63 percent came from foreign sources. The trend line indicates that this will only get worse if the U.S. does not make significant strides towards reducing consumption in the transportation sector.

Small steps can make a big difference. A 10 percent reduction in energy use from cars and light trucks would result in the savings of nearly 750,000 barrels of petroleum per day.

Today's electric hybrids are a step in the right direction to reducing our dependence on petroleum, with the Prius traveling about 50 miles per gallon of gasoline. But because the only **source** of energy for today's hybrids is the gasoline, some of that energy must go into charging the batteries, limiting the overall vehicle efficiency.

I'm excited by the prospect of plug-in hybrids because they are able to store more electrical energy on board, meaning they can travel farther on their initial charge and the gasoline carried on board. Plug-ins can also reduce the overall amount of pollution because power plants are more efficient at controlling combustion emissions than vehicles are.

One question I do have, however, is what impact plug-in hybrid use will have on our nation's electricity grid if we are successful in convincing hundreds of millions of Americans to purchase and use plug-in hybrid vehicles. In California, we don't have a whole lot of electricity to spare.

Advocates for plug-in hybrids say that we will recharge these cars at night, when most of the demand is base load, so it won't be a problem. But if we get enough people to adopt plug-in hybrid technology, will we exceed the capacity of the base load generation and need to use more power plants, ones that use natural gas as a fuel?

If so, then I fear we would just be shifting our addiction from one petrochemical to another. Hopefully the witnesses will address this in their testimony or in the question-and-answer period.

I share the Chairwoman's enthusiasm for this technology, and I look forward to hearing the testimony. Thanks again to the witnesses for being here, and I yield back the balance of my time.