

Shades of Green at Issue in Vehicle Fuel Standards Debate

There is more than one shade of green at issue as the U.S. House of Representatives takes up vehicle fuel efficiency standards this summer. And all shades of green matter to America's consumers.

Certainly, automakers should take aggressive steps toward increased Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards. Better gas mileage for new vehicles is a "green" environmental goal worthy of pursuit. Standards should be raised in a reasonable progression that significantly increases the fuel efficiency of the U.S. vehicle fleet. An average fuel economy level of 32-35 mpg by 2022 is a worthy objective.

At the same time, however, fuel efficiency is not the only green vehicle issue that matters to Americans, and it certainly is not the only green issue that the House should consider in legislation. Equally important are two other green issues: research for alternative fuels and technologies, and consideration of the cost impact on consumers.

Establishing higher CAFE standards isn't enough. We must pursue both the more efficient consumption of fossil fuel and ways to operate vehicles free from total dependence on it. Our leaders must promote technology that begins to wean the country from reliance on fossil fuels while enhancing research into biofuels, new battery technology and more efficient highway transportation.

At the same time, lawmakers must be mindful of the economic effect of these "green" issues. For example, new CAFE standards recently passed by the Senate (H.R. 6) will increase the cost of every vehicle sold in America by \$2000 to \$5000, according to the federal government's own estimates. That is simply too high a price to pay in the form of "green" from consumers' wallets – especially to agricultural, transportation and manufacturing segments of the economy. It would be a double whammy for consumers, who would pay more in both their personal vehicle costs and in the transportation costs of the retail products they consume.

Balance is possible. All shades of green—fuel efficiency, technical innovation and consumer income—can be accommodated in legislation that promotes a progressive, balanced drive to reasonable fuel standards. H.R. 2927, introduced by Rep. Baron Hill (D-IN) and Rep. Lee Terry (R-NE), will achieve a 28-40 percent improvement in fuel economy by targeting 32-35 mpg efficiency by 2022. At the same time, the legislation will support aggressive research into alternative technologies. Perhaps most important for consumers, it will not foist crippling vehicle price increases on consumers by setting standards above reasonable levels.

H.R. 2927 is the only legislation that gives proper consideration to all shades of green. It is the CAFE proposal that should be passed.