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Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on “The American Energy Initiative:
Legislative Responses to Rising Gasoline Prices”
Subcommittee on Energy and Power
March 28, 2012

Today, we’re examining the Republican response to gasoline prices. It’s not an encouraging occasion for families faced with rising costs at the pump.

The discussion drafts before us are not based in economic principle or sound policy. Their policies haven’t been publicly recommended to us by any knowledgeable or authoritative body. These bills are a package of half-baked ideas and give-aways to the oil industry. They are based on false premises. These are not solutions to the real problems that Americans are struggling with.

Republicans have two answers to gasoline prices at nearly \$4 per gallon. First, they propose drilling for more oil. Yet every economist and oil market expert tells us that this will have no meaningful impact on oil prices, which are set on a global market.

Just look north to Canada. Canadians drill plenty of oil. They are energy independent and they export to us. But this doesn’t bring them lower prices. In fact, their gasoline prices are higher than ours due to taxes.

We will also hear today that Republicans can bring down gasoline prices by blocking environmental regulations that protect Americans from dangerous air pollution.

No one should be fooled by this argument. Under Republican leadership, this body has become the most anti-environment Congress in history. Since January 2011, the House Republicans have voted more than 200 times to undermine the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and other environmental laws.

The premise of the legislation we will consider today is that high gas prices are caused by EPA regulations that haven’t even been proposed. That’s a complete fantasy. High gasoline prices are being caused by rising global demand, tensions in the Middle East, and tight supplies.

Americans want clean air. They don't want this Committee to use high gasoline prices as an excuse for blocking regulations to reduce toxic emissions from oil refineries.

Americans want cars that can go further on a gallon of gasoline. This is especially important when fuel prices are high. They don't want us to use high gasoline prices as a pretext for blocking clean fuel regulations that the auto companies need to make cleaner, more efficient vehicles.

But that is exactly what this legislation does.

Even worse, one of the bills before us contains the Latta amendment – a proposal that will cut the heart out of the Clean Air Act. It would overturn a unanimous 2001 Supreme Court case and repeal a 40 year-old law that says the goal of the Clean Air Act is to achieve air quality that is safe for Americans to breathe.

On our first panel today, we will hear from the Administration on gas prices. There is no silver bullet to gasoline prices, but the actions federal agencies are taking show that President Obama is charting the course for an economy that is built to last.

EPA will tell us how they have adopted rules that save consumers money at the pump and decrease the nation's oil demand. The Department of Interior will tell us about how American oil production has increased to levels we haven't seen in recent memory. And the Department of Energy will explain how they are researching and developing the clean energy options that will lessen our dependence on oil, and our vulnerability to price spikes, going forward.

Instead of supporting these valuable initiatives, the Republican-controlled House has done everything possible to frustrate them. The House has passed partisan legislation to prevent the Administration from cutting tailpipe emissions and making vehicles more efficient. The Republican budget would decimate the funding for clean energy.

And House Republicans have even opposed efforts to penalize oil companies that sit on oil leases and refuse to produce any oil until prices go higher.

If we really cared about helping the country become more resilient to gasoline price volatility, we would be working with the Administration instead of trying to block President Obama's every initiative.

But this hearing isn't about understanding and addressing gasoline prices. It is about using high gasoline prices as yet another rationale for advancing a profoundly anti-environment agenda.

Oil companies will surely benefit if these bills are enacted, and just as surely, American families will suffer.