

The Streamline Alternative Fuel Vehicle Conversions Act

Senator James M. Inhofe

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Statement for the Record:

Last summer when gasoline prices were hovering over \$4 per gallon, I was the first in Congress to introduce a comprehensive bill to promote the use of natural gas as a realistic alternative for the many Americans who were looking for price relief. The bill I introduced was called the Drive America on Natural Gas Act. Less than a year later, I'm encouraged to see several members on Capitol Hill have introduced similar bills promoting the use of natural gas and propane as a transportation fuel. Just last month I joined with Senator Pryor to once again introduce a comprehensive bill to promote these fuels for America's drivers. Additionally, Majority Leader Harry Reid just recently announced his firm support for natural gas vehicles and hopes to bring a stand-alone bill to the floor in the near future. I welcome the Majority Leader's support and encourage him to make this a priority for floor consideration.

One of the major components of my Drive America on Natural Gas Act addressed the desperate need to overhaul the EPA emission certification process which effectively prohibits the ability of nearly all car owners the option to legally convert a car to bi-fuel operation – a car that can run either on natural gas or gasoline at the flip of a switch. Why? With certification and emissions testing expenses ranging between \$50,000 and \$150,000 per conversion system type, the costs are prohibitive for the aftermarket conversion system manufacturers to produce these systems for more than just a handful of different vehicle models each year. And these heavy costs are ultimately borne by the consumer. Due to the rigidity and cost constraints of these regulations, EPA has issued less than 300 certificates over the past eight years. Oftentimes, the vehicle models eligible for conversion are only so for a short time, since a certification lasts less than a year before a conversion system manufacturer must decide if it will recertify that particular system.

Today I'm pleased to join with Senator Wicker, Congressman Dan Boren, and Congressman Heath Shuler to introduce bipartisan, bicameral legislation to simplify and streamline the EPA emissions certification process for aftermarket conversion systems. The Streamline Alternative Fuel Vehicle Conversions Act makes critical changes in five key ways so that vehicle conversions can become a commonplace option for all Americans.

First, our bill eliminates the need for subsequent yearly recertification after a system has already been certified. This provision avoids the needless re-submittal of data to EPA to recertify a system which has not changed.

Second, the legislation directs EPA to establish criteria that would cover several different yet

similar vehicle makes, models and model years on a single certificate of conformity using the test data from a single vehicle.

Third, we instruct EPA to allow the submission of previous testing data if a vehicle or the conversion system has not changed in a way which would affect compliance.

Fourth, our bill directs EPA to promulgate regulations to help conversion system manufacturers comply with potentially difficult on-board diagnostics (OBD) requirements and compatibility. Since 1996, OBD systems have been required in all light duty cars and trucks to monitor engine and emission components.

And finally, we clarify the treatment of vehicles which are beyond their useful life as defined by the EPA. These older vehicles, typically those that are at least 10 years old or have at least 120,000 miles, are by default regulated under the Clean Air Act's tampering provision, causing regulatory uncertainty. Our legislation would allow the conversion of these vehicles as long as the conversion system manufacturer or the converter is able to demonstrate that the emissions would not degrade due to a conversion.

Over the past several months, this legislation has been through numerous drafting reiterations with the assistance of NGV America, the National Propane Gas Association, and the EPA. I specifically want to thank the EPA for their input and assistance in helping us craft a bill which will aid the Agency in their efforts to streamline compliance. I'm also encouraged by EPA's internal efforts to reform the process, and I'm pleased that our bill will complement and enhance their actions.

By simplifying this compliance process, The Streamline Alternative Fuel Vehicle Conversions Act will not only incentivize conversion system manufacturers to offer more systems for additional vehicle makes and models, but will eventually reduce the costs of these conversion systems for interested car owners – perhaps by hundreds and even thousands of dollars.

Ultimately, this legislation will allow Americans to choose whether propane or natural gas powered vehicles are right for their own individual and business needs while simultaneously preserving the country's stringent emission standards. The promise of natural gas and propane as mainstream transportation fuels is achievable today, not 15 or 20 years from now, and this bill will help make that happen.