

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Whitehouse Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Hearing: “A Legislative Hearing to Examine a Discussion Draft of the Wildfire Emissions Prevention Act; and S. 881, the Renewable Fuel for Ocean-Going Vessels Act.”**

**September 10, 2025**

I would like to extend my thanks to Chairman Capito for holding this hearing on clean air legislation. Whether it’s reducing our greenhouse gas emissions or assuring Americans breathable unpolluted air, we are falling dreadfully short, and urgently need real solutions to these very real problems.

Let me turn first to wildfires. Climate scientists have warned since the very first IPCC report back in the early ‘90s that wildfires were becoming more destructive. It’s getting worse fast, as Western colleagues here know all too well.

Insurance markets have noticed and pulled back homeowners coverage in wildfire areas, just as they have in coastal areas, translating climate risk into rising cost and availability problems for families. The Great Climate Insurance Collapse, when it happens, will likely prompt a failure cascade, first into mortgage markets, then home values, then our entire economy. The Fed Chair has already warned us to expect entire regions of the country where mortgages just aren’t available. (I ask that my more complete warnings list be appended as an exhibit to these remarks.)

Better forest and land management has a role, but as Stanford Professor Michael Wara said in a Budget Committee hearing, these fixes may help win wildfire battles, but without addressing climate change, “we’re going to lose the war.”

A quick victory is near on maritime fuels. Marine shipping is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions fueling wildfires around the world; if marine shipping were its own country, it would be the world’s 6<sup>th</sup> largest carbon polluter. It also produces 9 percent and 18 percent of global sulfur oxide (SOx) and nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions. Locally, as these ships come into port, their fumes pollute neighborhoods along our coast. Most vessels are not U.S.-flagged and most of the goods—and related pollution — come from China.

How is a victory near? The International Maritime Organization, which regulates global shipping, is implementing a binding emissions standard, with an economic penalty for vessels violating the standard. Industry supports it. Shipping giant Maersk has long called for a \$150/ton pollution fee on maritime carbon emissions. It works: the IMO's 2020 policy capping sulfur in marine fuels has already reduced sulfur oxide emissions.

To no one's surprise, the Trump Administration is trying to undermine this process, another trophy for its fossil fuel donors. But few ships governed by this are U.S.-flagged, and the effect on American consumers will be negligible: pennies on a pair of Chinese-made shoes. Senator Padilla and I have bills to strengthen this standard for ships operating in U.S. waters, and I urge the IMO and the big international shippers to stick to their guns and finalize their fee.

That's important context for our discussion today on the Renewable Fuel for Ocean-Going Vessels Act, which would extend the Renewable Fuel Standard to maritime fuels. The global shipping community is already moving to low-carbon fuels like methanol and ammonia, to next-generation batteries, and — where they measure up — to advanced biofuels.

Biofuels, to succeed, will need to measure up. Unfortunately, the carbon accounting for conventional biofuels, under lifecycle emissions analysis, often does not measure up. Indeed, studies suggest that lifecycle emissions make some biofuels worse than petroleum.

The United States is the largest market in the world. Everyone wants to bring their goods to our ports to sell to U.S. consumers. We have the opportunity to compete and win in the market for low-carbon marine fuels, actually a win-win-win for our economy, our health, and our planet, but not if we don't even try. If we set up for a competition that doesn't exist, it's a prescription for failure.

Investments already made by in hydrogen and other low-carbon technologies were setting us up to be a global leader in this space. Unfortunately, the recently-passed Republican megabill undermined these investments. I hope together we can re-right that ship. American families—and the rest of the world—can no longer afford American inaction and backsliding on carbon pollution.