

Energy & Commerce Hearing: Rep. Markey Waves the Flag

Posted By [Marlo Lewis](#) On February 9, 2011 @ 1:51 pm In [Blog](#) | [1 Comment](#)

Rather than address the real issue of the hearing, namely, whether Congress or EPA should determine the content and direction of national policy, Rep. Ed Markey (D-Mass.) accuses supporters of the Energy Tax Prevention Act of working to “disarm” America in the war on terror.

He reasons as follows. EPA greenhouse gas (GHG) regulations would limit U.S. oil consumption, hence reduce imports of foreign oil. That in turn would reduce the quantity of petrodollars flowing to the Mideast, which in turn would reduce Mideast governments’ support for Al Qaeda. Therefore, any bill blocking EPA’s regulation of GHG emissions from, say, heavy trucks, is objectively pro-Al Qaeda and can only be explained by the greediness of Oklahoma oilmen.

This is horsefeathers on many levels.

First, stopping EPA would not affect U.S. oil imports one iota over the next five years. EPA’s proposed GHG standards for heavy-duty (HD) vehicles are indistinguishable in all but name with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration’s (NHTSA’s) proposed HD-vehicle fuel-economy standards. That’s why the two agencies proposed their standards in [one and the same rulemaking](#) ^[1]. NHTSA has separate authority to set fuel-economy standards for HD vehicles from the 2007 Energy Independence and Security Act (EISA). The Energy Tax Prevention Act would have no effect on NHTSA’s authority or plans.

More importantly, EPA and NHTSA’s joint greenhouse gas/fuel economy standards for heavy trucks would provide no detectable national security benefit even if one regards oil imports as a serious threat to U.S. national security.

The agencies estimate that their GHG/fuel economy standards for diesel trucks will reduce oil imports by 0.177 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2020 — about 65 million barrels lower than the baseline projection for that year (p. 74325). The U.S. imported [4,267 million barrels in 2009](#) ^[2], so the rule would avoid the equivalent of about 1.5% of current oil imports.

Note that oil demand and imports may fluctuate by substantially more than that from year-to-year. For example, from 2008 to 2009, U.S. oil imports declined by 460 million barrels. Has this fluctuation materially weakened Al Qaeda, the Iranian Mullahs, or the Taliban? If not, then why should they be hurt by the much smaller import reduction EPA and NHTSA are planning?

Although some petrodollars sent overseas undoubtedly trickle down to terrorist groups, there is no empirical evidence that fuel economy standards protect America from terror. As Cato Institute scholars [Jerry Taylor and Peter van Doren found](#) ^[3], there is no correlation between oil profits and Islamic terror:

We estimated two regressions using annual data from 1983 to 2005: the first between fatalities resulting from Islamic terrorist attacks and Saudi oil prices and the second between the number of Islamic terrorist incidents and Saudi oil prices. In neither regression was the estimated coefficient on oil prices at all close to being significantly different from zero.

In reality, the relationship between national security and oil import dependence is far from clear. Net oil imports account for well over half of current U.S. petroleum consumption. The EPA/NHTSA proposed rule will not get us even close to where things stood in 1973, when oil imports accounted for 35% of U.S. consumption (see [Figure 2.2 of this report](#) ^[4]).

A few simple questions should help put things in perspective: Was 1973 a good year for peace in the Middle East? Was it a time when OPEC was a shy and retiring actor on the world stage? Was it an innocent age that knew not hijackings, bombings, and the rise of international terror organizations? No, no, and no. The notion that EPA and NHTSA can make America safer by engineering a downtick in U.S. petroleum imports defies history and logic. For more on this topic, see my colleague Iain Murray’s essay, [A Free Market Approach to Energy Security](#) ^[5].

Mr. Markey employs an old rhetorical trick. When you can't refute your opponent's argument on the merits, change the subject and pretend that the debate is about something else. Markey can't refute the proposition that Congress, not EPA, should make climate policy. He can't refute the proposition that Congress never intended for the Clean Air Act to be a framework for climate policy, and never subsequently voted to use the Act as such a framework. So instead he tries to turn the hearing into a debate on whether real Americans support or oppose Islamic terror. Dr. Samuel Johnson had some [pithy words](#) ^[6] about rhetoric of this sort.

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[1] one and the same rulemaking: <http://www.masterresource.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/EPA-NHTSA-Proposed-Rule-GHG-Fuel-Economy-Standards-for-HD-Vehicles-Nov-30-20101.pdf>

[2] 4,267 million barrels in 2009: http://www.eia.doe.gov/dnav/pet/pet_move_impcus_a2_nus_ep00_im0_mbb1_a.htm

[3] Jerry Taylor and Peter van Doren found: http://www.cato.org/pubs/articles/taylor_vandoren_energy_security_obsession.pdf

[4] Figure 2.2 of this report: http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG838.pdf

[5] A Free Market Approach to Energy Security: <http://cei.org/sites/default/files/Iain%20Murray%20-%20Energy%20Security%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

[6] pithy words : <http://www.samueljohnson.com/refuge.html>

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