



**THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY INDEPENDENCE AND GLOBAL WARMING**

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN MARKEY

Hearing on “What’s Cooking with Gas: the Role of Natural Gas in Energy Independence and Global Warming Solutions”

July 30, 2008

Natural gas has been called the “prince of fossil fuels” and with good reason. It is cleaner burning and emits half the carbon dioxide of coal and one-third the amount of oil. Natural gas supplies a quarter of U.S. energy needs. It is a crucial component in many aspects of the U.S. economy from home heating, to electricity generation, to transportation fuel, to a feedstock for the chemical industry for everything from fertilizer to pharmaceuticals.

Over the last decade the price of natural gas has increased dramatically, leaving consumers with bills that require a king’s ransom to pay. Despite the recent dip, natural gas prices remain 2 to 3 times higher than they were at the beginning of this decade. It may be hard to imagine on a hot July day, but winter will be here soon, and many of our most vulnerable families will struggle to pay their heating bills.

High prices have allowed the extraction of natural gas using more expensive drilling techniques and spurred new exploration and the discovery of significant new on-shore resources. If developed in an environmentally responsible way, U.S. natural gas production could increase substantially.

But we must not forget that natural gas, like all fossil fuels, is both a finite resource and a contributor to greenhouse gases. Because of that reality, we must use it wisely, in a targeted manner, and we must use it efficiently and in ways that help transform our economy to one that is more energy secure and climate friendly. Today our witnesses will discuss a number of natural gas uses that are already helping to achieve these goals and what might be possible in the near future.

For example, the chemical industry produces composites that make our cars stronger and more fuel-efficient and insulation that reduces energy use in buildings.

Natural gas is helping to supply cleaner electricity to dense urban areas and expand the use of renewable technologies by providing electricity when the wind isn’t blowing or the sun isn’t shining. New highly efficient micro-combined-heat-and-power systems will allow homeowners to generate electricity and heat their homes while barely increasing their usage of natural gas.

Natural gas vehicles are already displacing gasoline and diesel and improving air quality. The replacement of diesel fleets such as buses and trucks with natural gas powered vehicles has

especially helped reduce dangerous air pollution in some of our most polluted cities. Fuel cell vehicles hold the promise of using natural gas more efficiently in the transportation sector.

As Congress considers energy policies that will increase our energy independence and help solve global warming, understanding the role of natural gas is critical. The testimony of our witnesses today should help us understand what policies are necessary to best deploy this precious natural resource.