



THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY INDEPENDENCE AND GLOBAL WARMING

Remarks of Edward Markey, Chair
Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming
April 2, 2008 Hearing

“From the Wright Brothers to the Right Solutions: Curbing Soaring Aviation Emissions”

As the Select Committee analyzes all causes of global warming, it cannot let aviation fly under the radar. Aviation emissions currently account for 12 percent of U.S. transportation emissions and 3 percent of emissions nationally and worldwide.

The impact of these emissions cannot be ignored. The CO₂, nitrous oxide, and particulate matter leaked into high altitudes alter our climate. Scientific debate does not center on whether CO₂ in the stratosphere is harmful; it questions how much more harmful CO₂ may be when compounded by other aviation emissions in the stratosphere.

The aviation industry has improved emission output through technology, but the rapidly increasing number of flights will exacerbate aviation emissions. The FAA has forecasted over a billion commercial passengers annually by 2015, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has predicted that, even assuming efficiency and infrastructure improvements, aviation emissions could double or triple by 2050. Aviation must answer for the heat-trappings of their own success.

Today’s hearing on aviation emissions should not be viewed as a mere “blip on the screen.” States, cities and organizations have petitioned the EPA to regulate aviation greenhouse gas emissions. Aviation fuels are currently being considered under a cap and trade system in Congress. The European Commission plans to integrate domestic and U.S. flights into the EU trading system. As local governments and other nations move to limit the impact of aviation on the environment, Congress cannot linger in a holding pattern.

The witnesses before us today address the three factors responsible for aviation emissions: operations, technology, and fuel. Regulating fuel emissions largely falls to the Environmental Protection Agency. The Federal Aviation Administration can discuss its vision to streamline aviation operations for more efficient flights. And the Natural Resources Defense Council’s transportation fuel director can discuss aviation fuel options and consequences.

The Air Transport Association and International Air Transport Association can discuss different approaches to aviation cap and trade regulations. Virgin Atlantic general counsel Jill Brady was unable to attend today’s hearing but submitted written testimony discussing Virgin’s groundbreaking commercial flight using biofuels and support for an international cap and trade scheme. I encourage the public to read her testimony as well as the testimony of the Boeing Corporation.

As aviation's contribution to global warming creeps up the IPCC charts, we cannot wait until it becomes a bigger threat. At one time, the number of automobiles on the road was not a significant contributor of global warming emissions. But even after that harm was established, decades of inattention and legislative delays led us to the environmental emergency that formed this Select Committee. With that in mind, I look forward to hearing everyone's testimony.