



Senators Urge Stricter Fuel Economy
Standards for SUVs and Light Trucks
August 23, 2005

Washington, DC – In response to the Administration’s announcement today to slightly improve fuel economy standards for SUVs, minivans and pick-up trucks, U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and four other Senators urged President Bush to set an even stricter national standard of 27.5 miles per gallon for light trucks by closing the “SUV loophole.”

Following is the text of a letter sent by Senators Feinstein, Olympia Snowe (R-Maine), Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), and Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) to President Bush:

“We have been advocating for the past several years that the most effective action we could take as a nation to decrease gas prices, improve our energy security, and reduce the amount of carbon dioxide Americans emit into the air would be to increase automobile fuel economy standards, particularly those of SUVs, minivans and pick-up trucks. While we were pleased to learn today that the Administration recognizes the importance of increasing the fuel economy of our least fuel efficient vehicles, we are profoundly disappointed that the proposed rule does not go far enough.

The United States is the largest consumer of oil, using 20.4 million barrels per day. Of that amount, 44 percent is used to power our vehicles. The heaviest, most fuel inefficient SUVs, minivans and pick-up trucks now make up 54 percent of the nation’s vehicle mix. While these light trucks are being used as passenger vehicles, they are currently held to a lower fuel efficiency standard. This ‘SUV loophole’ means that SUVs, minivans, and pick-up trucks are only required to achieve a 21 mile per gallon fuel economy standard, while cars must meet a 27.5 mile per gallon standard.

The most effective, and technologically feasible, action the federal government could take to reduce our dependence on oil would be to close the SUV loophole. Doing so would mean a national oil savings of 1 million barrels of oil per day by 2015, a 10 percent reduction in oil imports, and would prevent 240 million tons of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere. Closing the SUV loophole would also benefit consumers—saving them almost \$5 billion at the gas pump. According to one estimate, your proposal amounts to less than one month’s worth of gasoline savings over a fifteen year period. Certainly, working together as a nation, we can do better than that.

The technology exists today to close the SUV loophole. Relying on cylinder cut-off technology, clutchless manual transmission, or lighter weight materials for the body and frame of vehicles, auto manufacturers can increase fuel economy to more than 27 miles per gallon without sacrificing safety, performance, towing capacity or comfort. Given these facts, we would urge

you to amend the proposed fuel economy rule in order to more aggressively curb our oil use by closing the SUV loophole. The U.S. simply cannot continue to spend over \$350,000 every minute of every day to buy imported oil, some of which comes from the most volatile parts of the globe.

We appreciate your serious consideration of our request.”

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