

U.S. Rep. Sensenbrenner: Opposes expansion of the sale of higher ethanol-blended fuel

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 11, 2018

CONTACT

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Brookfield, WI Today, Congressman Jim Sensenbrenner (WI-05) sent a letter to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Acting Administrator Andrew Wheeler urging the EPA to reconsider its plan to expand the sale of E15 motor fuel.

Rep. Sensenbrenner: “The Renewable Fuel Standard violates free market principles, puts consumers at risk, and is harmful to the environment. Expanding the sale of E15 will increase the danger of misfueling, causing damage to engines and voiding consumer warranties. I urge the EPA not to move forward with this plan.”

Background

Congress first established the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) under the Energy Policy Act of 2005. The policy now requires that ethanol be blended into motor fuel at increasing levels each year. Currently, fuel can be produced and sold with a blend of 15 percent ethanol (E15). However, due to environmental regulations, E15 fuel cannot be sold during summer months. The Trump administration recently announced plans to lift the restrictions and allow for E15 sale year-round.

You can view the full text of the letter below:

October 11, 2018

The Honorable Andrew Wheeler
Acting Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Acting Administrator Wheeler:

I write to you with significant concerns about the recent proposal to expand the sale of E15 motor fuel. The Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) has been in place for more than a decade, yet this policy continues to violate the free market and pose a threat to consumers. Expanding to year-round E15 sales would prop up the RFS and continue to subject American consumers and farmers to government-mandated decision making.

I have had a very active role in the debate surrounding fuel blends with higher ethanol contents. Through this work, I have had ongoing conversations with many interested parties—your predecessors at the EPA, industry representatives, consumer groups, and environmental advocates. My work on this issue has always been driven by the belief that the government should not mandate the use of any product—or fuel—and the country would be better served if the RFS mandates are removed completely. Since this is as much a political debate as a policy-centered one, I recognize the barriers to a complete overhaul of the RFS. However, I would like to highlight some of the most glaring issues and how they will be exacerbated by the expanded sale of E15.

Contrary to the special interest arguments, the RFS is unfriendly to consumers. Misfueling with E15 is dangerous for many common machines. For example, lawnmowers, boats, snowmobiles, motorcycles, and vintage automobiles are incompatible with this fuel blend. The EPA acknowledged these issues in the original waiver permitting the use of E15 in newer automobiles. However, there has been insufficient work done to mitigate the potential for misfueling. Allowing for the expanded availability of E15 sales puts American consumers in greater jeopardy of the dangers of misfueling and product failure.

Free markets drive American innovation and sustain our economy. However, the RFS policy is antithetical to free market principles. The complex, government-

mandated market for renewable blending credits is ripe for fraud. Additionally, the EPA's use of its broad authority to grant exemptions from blending obligations demonstrates the standard's unattainability. Furthermore, approximately 40 percent of domestic corn production now feeds into ethanol production, meaning a not-insignificant portion of American farmers are subject to the whims of government policy. Rural America needs sustained, dependable growth, rather than programmed agricultural outputs generated by political motivations. The United States must return to its historical reliance on market-driven outcomes.

The RFS was established to strengthen national security by reducing dependence on foreign energy supplies. As an added benefit, it was also touted as decreasing the environmental impacts of automobile use. Some research questions whether increased farming activity correlated with the RFS cancels out its expected environmental benefits.

I understand some industries have exerted significant political pressure to convince the EPA to expand the E15 waiver. However, I urge you to consider the RFS's legacy before propping up this overly-rigid, failed energy policy.

Sincerely,

F. JAMES SENSENBRENNER, JR.
Member of Congress