

‘Balance Needed’ Say Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Leaders in US Senate Briefing

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Washington, DC—On March 5th, 2010, hydrogen and fuel cell industry experts joined Senator Daniel Akaka of Hawaii to brief Senate staff on the balance needed between industry and government commitments as well as between different clean vehicle technologies. Daimler, General Motors, Linde and Dr. C.E. (Sandy) Thomas led the event on “Solving the Market’s Dilemmas-Energy Infrastructure for Fuel Cell Electric Vehicles.”

Charles Freese, Executive Director of Fuel Cell Activities, General Motors spoke about the benefits of other electric technologies like pure battery electric vehicles which are very efficient for smaller, low speed and short range urban vehicles. However, said Freese, “hydrogen fuel cells are better suited than other electric technologies for some applications, like powering larger vehicles at highway speeds, and for larger family vehicles that can comfortably carry four or more passengers with heavier payloads.”

The Senate briefing occurred while Congress is reviewing the Fiscal Year 2011 Budget Request. Industry has invested billions of dollars to mature these technologies and remains extremely interested in pushing to commercialization. To underscore the commitments from industry, in just the last few months, many automakers have announced that they will commercialize fuel cell vehicles in 2015 in the regions that have hydrogen stations. Germany, Korea, Japan and California have plans and initial government investment for building the early network of hydrogen stations that will allow thousands of people to conveniently fuel their vehicles. Also, non-automotive applications for fuel cells, like materials handling and back-up power, are experiencing success because companies have noticed that even at their early commercial stage, these fuel cells can save companies money over incumbent technologies, while also reducing emissions.

To justify industry’s continued investment in hydrogen and fuel cells, members of the National Hydrogen Association and U.S. Fuel Cell Council say that the Federal government must also remain a committed, reliable partner. Until enough fuel cell vehicles are on the road so that station owners can sell enough hydrogen to be self-supporting, government needs to invest in stations. But funding hydrogen and fuel cell development and deployment should not occur at the expense of other technologies because it takes a balanced portfolio of advanced transportation alternatives to compete with incumbent liquid fuels.

“It takes 4-5 years to develop a powertrain and vehicle and put it on the road,” said Freese. “We need stable policy and to stay the course for putting these vehicles on the road. It’s not something that can swing with the price at the pump or the political climate.”

Underscoring the readiness to build fueling stations, Michael McGowan, Head of Strategic Alliances, Alternative Energy Solutions for the Linde Inc. said “Linde and other hydrogen infrastructure providers have made significant improvements in hydrogen refueling. We have developed, and demonstrated, the ability to fill cars with hydrogen at pressures of either 350 or 700 bar in less than 3 minutes – all while reducing capital, operating, and maintenance costs.”

Sascha Simon, Head of Advanced Product Planning for Mercedes-Benz USA, spoke about German-organized coalitions that are moving forward on deployment with successful collaborations between industry and government partners—the kind worth replicating in the U.S. if an American leadership position for developing hydrogen fuel cell electric vehicles is desired. “We had a major breakthrough in Germany in September 2009. What we have been able to achieve is to come together as car companies, infrastructure providers, fueling station providers, and government with a coordinating function. About 1.4 billion euros have been committed for a 10-year program [to introduce cars and stations in a coordinated way]. Industry is doing its fair share, committing 700 million euros and government is committing 700 million euros.”

The event, opened by Senator Daniel Akaka of Hawaii, a long time supporter of hydrogen and fuel cells and advanced

renewable technologies, welcomed about 80 to the Dirksen Senate Office Building and featured speakers: C. E. (Sandy) Thomas, Ph.D., former President of H2 Gen Innovations, Inc., Sascha Simon, Head of Advanced Product Planning, Mercedes-Benz USA, and Michael McGowan, Head of Strategic Alliances, Alternative Energy Solutions, Linde Inc. Jerome Hinkle of the National Hydrogen Association and Ruth Cox of the U.S. Fuel Cell council co-moderated the event.

Video and presentations from this event are now publicly available. Visit:
www.hydrogenassociation.org/policy/briefing_5mar10.asp

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About the National Hydrogen Association

The National Hydrogen Association (NHA) is the premier hydrogen trade organization led by 100 companies dedicated to supporting the transition to hydrogen. Efforts are focused on education and outreach, policy, safety and codes and standards. Since 1989, the NHA has served as a catalyst for information exchange and cooperative projects and continues to provide the setting for mutual support among industry, research and government organizations. www.HydrogenAssociation.org

About the U.S. Fuel Cell Council

The USFCC is a trade association and voice of the fuel cell industry. The USFCC is dedicated to fostering the commercialization of fuel cells. Our members include the world's leading fuel cell developers, manufacturers, suppliers and customers. www.usfcc.com

National Hydrogen Association
1211 Connecticut Ave NW
Washington, DC 20036

Patrick Serfass
202.223.5547
serfassp@hydrogenassociation.org

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