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## OPENING STATEMENT

**Rep. Alcee L. Hastings**  
**Chairman**

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**“Clearing the Air, Feeding the Fuel Tank:  
Understanding the Link between Energy and Environmental Security”**

May 6, 2008

I want to welcome everyone. Today’s hearing is the third in a series of hearings the Helsinki Commission is holding on energy security and frankly we could not be holding this hearing at a better time. Not only are we faced with record high oil prices, but at a time when we are trying to find and use alternative fuel sources such as biofuels, we are seeing a shocking rise in food prices that is devastating the poor and straining the wallets of the middle class all over the world. I’m very interested to hear the opinions of our panelists today on what, if any, connection there is between these two situations.

All governments are struggling to find the right mix to meeting what seem to be competing demands for energy independence, sustainability and affordability. And there are lots of voices and perspectives out there vying for attention.

Sometimes—and most probably all of the time—it is instructive to take a look back before we look forward. In the 1800s we relied on whale oil for heating and light and it drove the whale population into decline. Crude oil was around, but it hadn’t caught on as a fuel source. In fact one of its first uses here in the United States was as a health cure.

In the late 1800’s people began scooping up the oil bubbling out of the ground and used it for kerosene to light their lamps. And as more oil was found and refined to make more kerosene for lamps, the byproduct, gasoline, was simply thrown out because there was no use for it. But the invention of the “horseless carriage” which could run on the stuff that was being thrown away, changed history. By 1920 there were nine million motor vehicles in this country and gas stations were opening everywhere. And here we are in 2008, consuming over 20 million barrels of oil per day.

What happens next? Can we find the next vehicle or fuel that will carry us forward to a new energy paradigm that solves our climate change, oil dependency and economic problems all at the same time?

The stakes are high. The UN reports on climate change underscore a cruel irony—that the overwhelming environmental costs of climate change will be felt in the countries least responsible for climate change and least able to deal with the consequences. It would be an even greater tragedy if our own efforts to ameliorate climate change add an even greater burden on others. We need to take a level-headed look at all of our options and try to realize what the consequences could be. Because there will be consequences. The question is whether they are manageable and reasonable.

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