

(June 28, 2005) Congressman Lipinski Speaks on H.R. 2048

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House Subcommittee on Workforce, Empowerment & Government Programs

WASHINGTON, DC - U.S. Rep. Dan Lipinski released the following statement at the Subcommittee Hearing on H.R. 2048, the Motor Vehicle Owners' Right to Repair Act of 2005:

Thank you Madam Chairman.

As we advance into the 21st century - so do our cars and trucks. Today's vehicles continue to get more and more sophisticated - with technological advances such as computerized navigation and ignition systems. In recent years there has been a push to make our cars more resilient, powerful and environmentally sound.

Along with today's automotive advancements, comes a need for advanced knowledge of repair and service. There is an obvious gap here - the types of repair manuals that may have sufficed a decade ago simply do not provide the information necessary to repair newer, more complex vehicles. Today's repair shops need to know how to check (1) settings, (2) component schematics, and (3) equipment interfaces - something they simply aren't able to get from repair manuals.

As vehicles become more complex, the lack of readily accessible repair information would have undesirable consequences. With fewer shops available to do a repair, we have to expect increased costs for the car owner. Given the expenses that already exist with today's vehicles - consumers do not need additional repair costs.

It is important that consumers have options when it comes to getting their cars repaired - and that they can rely on their local repair shops to get the job done. Many people turn to their long time neighborhood mechanics - the ones they have come to trust - who are usually small business owners. But how do mechanics understand the mechanical, technical, and computer systems on each car model?

Currently in place is a voluntary system for sharing information between automobile manufacturers and service shops. This system is designed to allow web-based access to information on how to repair and service vehicles from over 30 different brands. But there are questions about how well this voluntary system works.

Today's hearing will examine whether there is a problem, and to what extent it persists. We will specifically look at one possible solution - H.R. 2048, The Right to Repair Act - which has been introduced by Mr. Barton, chair of the Energy and Commerce Committee. I applaud Mr. Barton for his work on this issue and I look forward to hearing his testimony.

H.R. 2048 creates a system that would allow access - via the Internet - to repair information and service training for all parts of a vehicle. This would be administered and enforced by the FTC. In addition, the bill creates a legal duty to immediately provide a vehicle owner, or repair shop of the owner's choosing, with all the necessary information to diagnose or repair the vehicle. This sounds like a reasonable approach - but we must evaluate all of its possible implications.

As the committee proceeds today to examine this issue, it is important to ensure that whatever solution is found does not have unintended negative consequences. While working to solve one problem we need to guard against creating additional ones through our actions. Clearly, there are small businesses on both sides of this issue - whether it is the independent repair shop or the local dealership - all of whom would be impacted by the Right to Repair bill.

It is very important that we carefully examine the issue at hand and evaluate the necessity for these types of changes. The automotive service and repair issue involves many players - repair shops, dealerships and consumers - and we need to make sure that any changes are fair and balanced for all those involved. We want to have a system that provides information, doesn't give one entity an advantage over the other, and in the end gives the consumer the best possible deal.

This is an interesting and unique topic, and I look forward to hearing the testimony of today's witnesses and to the discussion.

Thank you.