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**Committee:** Senate Environment & Public Works Committee  
**Event:** [Hearings to examine S.3135, to require the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency to authorize manufacturers of certain vehicles to suspend engine derate or shutdown functions in prolonged cold weather conditions.](#)  
**Date:** March 11, 2026

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***Executive Summary:***

The Senate Environment & Public Works Committee hosted a hearing focused on the “Cold Weather Diesel Reliability Act of 2025” ([S.3135](#)). Republican members supported the bill, arguing it provides necessary flexibility for diesel engines in extreme cold to prevent derates that endanger safety. Democrats opposed the bill, warning it could weaken *Clean Air Act (CAA)* protections and set a precedent for rolling back emissions standards.

[Chair Shelley Moore Capito \(R-WV\)](#): Capito explained that modern diesel vehicles rely on selective catalytic reduction (SCR) systems that use diesel exhaust fluid (DEF) to reduce emissions, with onboard diagnostic sensors triggering an engine “derate,” limiting vehicles to five miles per hour, when the system detects a malfunction. She warned that sensor failures or frozen DEF in prolonged cold weather can trigger derates, leaving farmers' equipment disabled or truck drivers stranded in remote areas. Capito highlighted S.3135 as a potential solution, allowing manufacturers to override emissions monitoring restrictions in targeted cold-weather environments.

[Ranking Member Sheldon Whitehouse \(D-RI\)](#): Whitehouse argued that S.3135 addresses an issue the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has already resolved through prior regulatory adjustments. He defended the *Clean Air Act's* vehicle emissions standards and emphasized their role in significantly reducing smog-causing pollutants such as nitrogen oxides (NOx) and driving the adoption of emissions control technologies for diesel engines.

[Sen. Dan Sullivan \(R-AK\)](#)<sup>1</sup>: Sullivan said that his bill, S.3135, is necessary to address real-world safety risks created by EPA diesel emissions rules that require automatic engine “derates” when emissions systems malfunction. He explained that in extremely cold states like Alaska, DEF systems and sensors can freeze or fail, causing trucks to slow to five miles per hour or shut down entirely. Sullivan noted that this could leave drivers stranded in remote areas in potentially life-threatening conditions. He emphasized that his bill is intended to provide flexibility for diesel vehicles operating in extreme cold environments where current one-size-fits-all regulations can create safety issues.

***Witness Toplines:***

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<sup>1</sup> Opening statement was not available online at the time of this memo's distribution.

*Ryan Anderson, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities*<sup>2</sup>:

Anderson stressed that modern diesel emissions control systems using DEF are frequently failing in Alaska's extreme cold, creating operational and safety challenges for transportation and state infrastructure. He explained that prolonged temperatures below freezing can cause emissions systems to freeze or malfunction, triggering engine derates that disable trucks and heavy equipment in remote areas. Anderson emphasized that these reliability issues affect essential services such as highway maintenance and food delivery. He argued that S.3135 would provide a targeted solution for equipment operating in sustained extreme cold conditions.

*Todd Fornstrom, President, Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation*: Fornstrom explained that while

farmers support clean air and environmental stewardship, the requirement to use DEF in modern diesel engines has created reliability and operational challenges for agricultural equipment. He explained that DEF systems can malfunction in harsh farm conditions such as extreme cold, heat, and dust, causing equipment shutdowns that disrupt farm operations. Fornstrom expressed support for the S.3135 and argued that it would provide necessary flexibility for diesel-powered farm equipment operating in extreme weather conditions.

*John Walke, Clean Air Director and Senior Attorney, Natural Resources Defense Council*<sup>3</sup>:

Walke stressed his opposition to the S.3135. He argued that the EPA has already addressed cold weather issues affecting diesel emissions systems by directing manufacturers to update engine designs and software to prevent premature engine derates. He warned that the bill could create broad exemptions from *Clean Air Act* requirements and undermine existing emissions safeguards. Walke urged members to focus oversight on recent EPA regulatory cuts and their potential impacts on air quality and public health.

### ***Major Takeaways:***

#### Diesel Emissions Systems and Reliability

- Sullivan argued that DEF emissions frequently malfunction in extreme cold, triggering engine "derates" that can create safety risks by disabling trucks and equipment in remote areas.
- Sen. **Pete Ricketts** (R-NE) noted that DEF sensor malfunctions in Nebraska have slowed farm equipment and delayed planting and harvesting.
- Sen. **Cynthia Lummis** (R-WY) emphasized that DEF sensor malfunctions due to extreme weather reduce vehicles' miles per gallon and increase their emissions.

#### Economic Impacts:

- Capito explained that derates during planting or harvesting can negatively impact crop yields and overall farm productivity.
- Sullivan highlighted that DEF system issues create financial burdens for both state transportation operations and individual farmers, particularly when commodity prices are low.
- Ricketts emphasized that repair costs and lost productivity from DEF-related vehicle failures impose substantial economic and safety risks for rural truckers.

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<sup>2</sup> Opening statement was not available online at the time of this memo's distribution.

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Emissions Standards and *Clean Air Act* Protections:

- Whitehouse criticized recent EPA rollbacks under the Trump Administration, warning that weakened enforcement of emissions restrictions harms public health and property markets.
  - He also pointed out the health impacts of reduced emissions standards, estimating that fossil fuel pollution has cost the U.S. an estimated \$820 billion per year in healthcare costs.
- Sen. **Alex Padilla** (D-CA) raised concerns that statutory exemptions for cold-weather states could undermine the consistency and enforceability of CAA standards nationwide.

Views on the “Cold Weather Diesel Reliability Act of 2025”:

- Sullivan, Lummis, Ricketts, and Capito stressed their support for S.3135, arguing it provides targeted flexibility for diesel engines operating in extreme cold.
- Sullivan emphasized that his bill effectively balances practical safety and operational needs with emissions reductions.
- Padilla and Whitehouse criticized S.3135, warning it could set a precedent for weakening emissions protections in other regions.