

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Michael C. Burgess, M.D.
Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade Hearing on
“Disrupter Series: Self-Driving Cars”
November 15, 2016**

Good morning and welcome to today’s Disrupter Series hearing on self-driving cars – a ground-breaking technological development that has the potential to completely transform and redefine the vehicle and transportation system we know and understand today.

Because this may be the last time we have Dr. Rosekind before us, let me first thank him for his service. He has always cooperated with this Committee as we have worked to improve the agency, the recall process, and improve safety. Thank you.

Self-driving cars promise to be the most significant automobile related safety development in our lifetime. This hearing will kick off what I expect to be a major focus of this subcommittee in the years to come. The reason for that is simple. Last year, automobile related fatalities were around 35,000 and rose for the first time in nearly a decade. In my home state of Texas, the number was 3,516. The vast majority of those fatalities are still related to human behavior. Already, we have heard that fatalities are up again in the first half of this year.

Truly self-driving cars are not about to be deployed in any great numbers anytime soon. But the sooner we can safely get them to market – the sooner we start saving lives. I, for one, am not among those who are worried that adoption of this new technology will outpace safety. It will not be broadly adopted before its ready. So our job is to be really smart and identify a path forward where government can police industry and respond quickly where safety incidents arise. But we cannot let government paralyze the very innovation that promises to make us safer.

I think NHTSA’s recent guidance is well meaning. But I do worry greatly about its implementation. Waiting for the government to approve technology is never a good formula. That said we must remain vigilant in areas, like cybersecurity, where industry must be held accountable if they are not taking reasonable measures.

In addition to safety, self-driving cars promise a reduction in fuel emissions and energy consumption as a result of improved mobility and more efficient traffic flows. Self-driving vehicles may also allow for more efficient land use instead of wasting resources parking in city lots. We can also expect to see an increase in transport and mobility opportunities such as ride-hailing and ride-sharing services; opportunities for labor cost savings; improved transportation access for disabled, elderly, and underserved populations; and many other enhancements that improve the societal and economic welfare of communities across the country. This is what makes the development and deployment of autonomous cars so exciting: their impact will be virtually limitless.

As Dean Kamen reminded all of us at our last Disrupter Series hearing: we cannot let the perfect be the enemy of the good. That means allowing innovators to develop the technology and giving them the flexibility to test its potential. Preemptive action on the part of regulators, before gaining a full understanding or appreciation of self-driving cars, may lead to unintended consequences that limit the capabilities of this emerging technology and its promised life-saving, economic, and societal benefits. I thank the witnesses for taking the time to inform us about this technology and I look forward to a thoughtful and engaging discussion.

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