

Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection
“Self-Driving Vehicle Legislation”
June 27, 2017

First, I want to thank and commend Chairman Latta for today’s hearing and for the subcommittee’s diligent work on self-driving vehicles.

Unfortunately, our nation has seen a sharp rise in vehicle-related injuries and deaths over the past few years. In my home State of Oregon, traffic fatalities last year were the highest they’ve been since 2003 - up 20 percent from the year before.

While no one is claiming that these numbers can be turned around overnight, self-driving vehicle technology has the potential to dramatically improve safety on our nation’s roadways and that is one of the most important reasons to advance the bills we have under consideration today.

In addition to making our roadways safer, self-driving vehicle technology has the potential to offer many other benefits.

I see real benefits in terms of cleaner cars with less of an environmental impact. The technological advances spurred by self-driving vehicles could ultimately make cars more efficient and create a positive shift in the industry.

Additionally, this technology could help increase transportation access to underserved and rural communities and reduce traffic congestion in some of our largest cities.

Self-driving vehicles could greatly improve mobility and accessibility, empowering senior citizens and those who suffer from disabilities. Simple things most of us take for granted, such as going to the doctor or to the nearby grocery store, may no longer present insurmountable hurdles for those who currently rely on others.

However, for these benefits to be realized, we must create a regulatory framework that provides companies with the flexibility to test and generate data that will inform the continued development of these vehicles. We must also provide appropriate government oversight to ensure that this is done in a safe and secure manner.

It's also time for Congress to clarify the roles of both federal and state government with regard to this industry. Just as Congress ensured uniformity in railroads traversing America, we need to make certain that in the future our cars can take us from one state to another. For America to remain a leader in this field, we need to act.

I want to thank our distinguished panel for being with us today to engage in this extremely important discussion and I look forward to working with my colleagues on this critical issue.