

**Opening Statement of Chairman Latta  
Subcommittee on Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection  
Hearing on “Oversight of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration”**

**February 14, 2017**

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Good morning. I would like to begin by recognizing someone who is sadly not with us here today. Last week, the Energy and Commerce Committee lost our staff director, Ray Baum, after a years-long battle with cancer. Ray was a dedicated public servant, both here in DC and at home in Oregon, an exemplary leader on the committee, and a good friend. My thoughts and prayers are with his family during this difficult time.

In that vein, thank you all for being here today. Welcome to the Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection Subcommittee’s hearing “Oversight of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).” The Deputy Administrator, Heidi King, is here to update the committee on many important safety issues at NHTSA. Oversight of agencies within the committee’s jurisdiction is critical. Thank you, Ms. King, for appearing today to discuss NHTSA’s priorities and answer questions.

NHTSA was established by Congress in 1970 to oversee motor vehicle safety, and is tasked with reducing traffic-related deaths, injuries and economic losses. NHTSA accomplishes its vehicle safety mission through three major programs:

- Setting motor vehicle safety standards or FMVSS;
- Enforcement by investigating motor vehicle defects and administering its recall program; and,
- Research, data collection, and data analysis.

Today, the mission remains to keep drivers safe. All of the tools at NHTSA's disposal are important, including recent updates to IT infrastructure within the Office of Defect Investigations. In recent years, our country has seen an unacceptable rise in traffic fatalities. In 2015, traffic deaths rose by 7.7 percent and in 2016, we lost more than 37,000 individuals on our roadways. This two-year increase is the most dramatic escalation in traffic fatalities in more than 50 years.

According to NHTSA, the three main causes of accidents are (1) people not wearing their seatbelts; (2) impaired driving (drunk or drugged driving); and (3) driver error. 94% of all accidents are due to human error. We need to continue to work to find real-world solutions that reduce risks and save lives.

Technology plays an important role in improving motor vehicle safety, and we are seeing more and more advanced safety features in cars on the road today. Over a year ago, this subcommittee began a review of these new automated features and then expanded to examining the path to self-driving vehicle technology here in the U.S. After three hearings, two markups, and hundreds of

meetings, we passed the SELF DRIVE Act 54-0 out of this Committee and the House voice voted to approve the bill last September.

We will continue to work to get the bill to the President's desk, because we know this technology will not wait for the government to catch up. As other countries work to surpass the U.S. in the race for self-driving technology, we want to make sure this incredible innovation, and the high-quality jobs it brings, stay right here at home.

With that background, it is encouraging to see the continued focus at NHTSA on self-driving technology and the potential benefits to improve safety. When this process began, the first Federal Automated Vehicle Policy outlined one of the basic principles that laid the foundation for the SELF DRIVE Act:

- NHTSA is the national safety regulator for the design, construction, and performance of motor vehicles.

This is true today and should remain true as we transition to a fleet that includes self-driving cars.

Turning to driver impairment: I applaud the agency's recent announcement of an initiative to combat drugged-driving. According to recent reports, drivers killed in a car crash in which drugs were detected surpass those killed in crashes where only alcohol was involved. In 2015, 43 percent of fatal crashes involved drugs compared to 37 percent that involved alcohol. The opioid crisis is having a

fatal impact in my district and every state across the country. In 2016 alone, 4,050 Ohio residents died of unintentional drug overdoses. I have been active in Committee and in my district working on this epidemic.

The opioid crisis in America is far-reaching, and devastating to families and communities. Combating the epidemic is an all-hands-on-deck effort, and part of it includes examining drugged driving initiatives, like improving roadside detection and supporting law enforcement. We stand ready to help our communities address all aspects of the opioid crisis and save lives.

We will also continue to deal with the Takata recall. The scope and complexity of this recall has resulted in recall completion rates lower and at a pace slower that have been frustrating both as a lawmaker and as a consumer. With recalls scheduled into 2020, I look forward to an update on the status of this recall and any lessons learned by NHTSA that can be used in future recalls. I encourage consumers to visit [safercar.gov](http://safercar.gov) to check if their car is subject to recall.

Deputy Administrator King, thank you for being here today and I look forward to working with you on these and many other important issues.