

**Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection
Hearing on “Oversight of the National Highway Traffic Safety
Administration”
February 14, 2017**

Thank you, Chairman Latta. This morning we begin a series of oversight and budget-related hearings across the jurisdiction of the Energy and Commerce committee. It is essential that we in Congress, and more importantly the American public, know what is going on at federal agencies. Today, we will hear from Deputy Administrator King about the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration’s (NHTSA) priorities and safety initiatives.

Safety on our roadways is a national imperative. With the number of traffic fatalities on the rise – increasing to more than 37,000 in 2016, it remains critical to evaluate NHTSA’s efforts to keep our nation’s roadways and vehicles safe. With the growing number of devices and services designed to keep Americans constantly occupied, distracted driving has become a serious problem.

In my home state of Oregon, there were over 4,000 distracted driving crashes in 2014 alone. In total, Ninety-four percent of traffic-related crashes are due to human error.

We all have stories about our commutes to the office or around our district, and what people will do while also trying to drive. Technology, responsibly developed, has the potential to transform the driving operation and reduce risks from distraction and impairment.

This subcommittee worked with a wide range of stakeholders, over many months, and ultimately the full committee reported the bipartisan SELF DRIVE Act – 54-0. The House passed the bill a few weeks later without opposition. We did not let the chance to save lives and support American innovation pass us by, and I remain committed to moving this legislation to the President’s desk this year. I would like to thank Chairman Latta, Ranking Member Schakowsky, Rep. Upton, and Rep. Dingell for their work on this important legislation.

The SELF DRIVE Act will provide companies with greater flexibility to test and generate data for the development of self-driving cars and, importantly, clarifies NHTSA's role as the national safety regulator.

Not only will these vehicles make our roadways safer, they also have the potential to improve mobility for the elderly and disabled and increase transportation access for rural and traditionally underserved communities.

Turning to another issue that is impacting every district in the country - the opioid crisis. I look forward to hearing more about the recently announced Drugged Driving Initiative at NHTSA. Driving under the influence of prescription opioids and marijuana now causes more traffic fatalities than driving under the influence of alcohol.

This is a prime example of an issue where federal leadership is valuable to bring together stakeholders, such as law enforcement and other community leaders, to find a way to protect people on our roads and combat the opioid crisis.

While there are new opportunities on the agenda for NHTSA, the agency still faces many challenges. Recall completion rates, including the ongoing Takata recall, continue to be an area where we encourage improvement. The complexity of the Takata recall only seems to grow, and even this week there is another expansion of "do not drive" warnings.

I would appreciate an update from on the agency's ongoing efforts in the Takata recall, next steps, and lessons learned for the next stages of the recall. This recall will be ongoing through 2020, and we need to make sure that consumers have all the information they need to get their airbags replaced as quickly and safely as possible. SaferCar.gov has a search tool so you can see if your car has any open recalls.

Looking at the recall issue on a broader scale, I am also interested hearing about efforts to improve secondary market players' ability to identify and remove recalled parts from the supply chain. There have been discussions about improving the ability for stakeholders to search multiple VINs at once, or batch searches. Any updates on NHTSA-lead or industry-lead efforts on this front would be greatly appreciated. It's critical we continue to improve the recall process.

America's roadways are the backbone of our nation. Far from just being a way to get from point A to point B, safely traveling, for business, family events, vacation, or simply running errands, is a necessity for families across the country. We must continue working together to encourage innovation, promote best practices, and be at the forefront of technological advances in the auto industry. Progress is critical to enhance vehicle and roadway safety for our nation's drivers.

I want to thank Deputy Administrator King again for being here today and I look forward to this important safety discussion.