

Opening Statement
Chairman Paul D. Tonko
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce and Subcommittee on Environment and
Climate Change
Joint Hearing on “Driving in Reverse: The Administration’s Rollback of Fuel Economy and
Clean Car Standards”
June 20, 2019

Thank you, Madam Chair. Today we examine the Trump Administration’s proposal to freeze fuel economy standards at Model Year 2020 levels for years 2021 through 2026. This action would have lasting negative consequences for the American auto industry that needs certainty to compete and for consumers who will pay more at the pump.

This proposal will undermine American jobs throughout the auto supply chain. As we stand still, other nations will continue to race forward to develop the next generation of innovative vehicle technologies, ensuring that future investments will be made overseas where markets for such products continue to grow.

NHTSA’s own analysis suggests thousands of U.S. jobs may be lost as a result of this rule. In fact, a large group of automakers has now registered opposition to this misguided proposal.

While it is clear that this course of action will unnecessarily harm consumers and industry, it will also compromise our public health and the environment. EPA’s tailpipe standards are the most important federal climate policy currently on the books. This proposal takes us even farther backwards on climate and will increase oil consumption and U.S. CO2 emissions significantly. Transportation is the largest contributor of domestic greenhouse gas emissions, and light-duty vehicles account for nearly 60% of that sector’s emissions.

This proposed rollback ignores climate science and the evidence of the devastation already flooding and burning our communities. It is reckless climate denial of a kind we can no longer afford.

These standards are not only important for climate action. They also reduce conventional air pollution. New York State adopted California’s ZEV standard in the early 1990s, long before climate was the urgent priority it is today. This was done to improve poor air quality, which impacts disadvantaged communities first and foremost.

States are investing hundreds of millions of dollars in incentives and infrastructure to achieve air pollution reduction targets, including important climate goals, and California’s standards are a critical part of that effort. Unfortunately, instead of upholding its mission of environmental protection, EPA seems eager to tie the hands of states that are working to deal with this pollution impact.

Over and over we have heard this Administration pay lip service to cooperative federalism; apparently that only applies to states pursuing deregulation.

I was dismayed that the Administration threatened to pull its participation in this hearing if seated on the same panel with their state partner. Like the rule itself, this behavior is bizarre. The Administration has a responsibility to recognize California as a partner and co-regulator in this process.

This EPA may not want California to be able to set its own standards. But if they do not like the current process, they need to submit a proposal to Congress to amend the Clean Air Act. Because on this matter, the law is clear. California has the right to seek waivers, EPA is required to err on the side of granting them, and 177 states are entitled to adopt California's standards.

I would also remind everyone that we did, in fact, have a single national standard before the Administration manufactured this crisis.

Today we will have many questions on the development of this rule, and its likely outcomes should it move forward. But the overarching question to our Administration witnesses needs to be this: "What exactly are you hoping to accomplish?"

At best it isn't clear. And a reasonable observer would be forgiven for seeing an Administration so blinded by contempt for its predecessors and so willing to hurt consumers to support oil companies at any cost that it would defy science and common sense to move forward with a proposal with near universal condemnation from stakeholders.

The Administration's proposal is certainly destined for legal challenges, but my greater fear is that American consumers, businesses, and the environment will ultimately suffer the greatest consequences of the uncertainty caused by this reckless rule.

With that, I yield my remaining time to Mrs. Dingell.