

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.

Hearing on “Promises and Perils: The Potential of Automobile Technologies”

May 18, 2021

Last year, more than 42,000 people died in the United States as a result of automobile accidents and nearly 4.8 million were injured. These deaths and injuries are preventable and demand action from Congress and federal regulators.

We are prepared to meet this challenge with a bold vision for safety and innovation that will save lives, boost domestic manufacturing, strengthen our industrial base, protect and create new jobs, and grow wages.

In the last session of the House we passed The Moving Forward Act. That included important auto safety reforms that mandate proven safety technologies that could save 20,000 lives per year.

The legislation included the Five Stars for Smart Cars Act, which would have modernized the five-star safety rating and provided consumers with meaningful information about the safety of vehicles. It also included provisions that would have mandated crash avoidance systems and drunk driving prevention technology. It would have also put an end to children dying in hot cars, prevented carbon monoxide poisoning and dangerous rollaways of keyless ignition vehicles, and finally addressed glaring limousine safety issues.

This is our vision to end the epidemic of automobile crashes and save Americans’ lives. And by putting Americans’ safety first, we’re also putting American workers, the industrial base, and our economy first. An investment in safety is an investment in domestic manufacturing.

Auto manufacturing is still the largest domestic manufacturing sector. But like many manufacturing sectors, our auto industry faces steady headwinds. Domestic auto production has decreased by 11 percent since 1994. During that same period, nearly a fifth of all vehicle and parts manufacturing jobs were lost and real wages decreased by 22 percent.

This hollowing out of America’s industrial might threatens our economic security and harms our ability to compete internationally. If this century is to be another American century, the United States must harness innovation, strengthen the industrial base, and invest in the American worker.

That’s why I’m so pleased that the Biden Administration has released a transformative proposal – the American Jobs Plan – to upgrade our nation’s infrastructure, revitalize manufacturing, and shore up supply chains.

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Cutting edge technologies like autonomous vehicles (AVs) hold the promise of improving safety, expanding mobility, and strengthening our economy. Fortunately, we hold a competitive edge in developing and deploying AVs. According to KPMG, the United States ranks higher in preparedness for AVs than Japan, Germany, and China.

We must preserve and expand this advantage by making sure that the United States – not countries like China – writes the rules of the road for this technology. But we must chart a course that balances deployment with our fundamental American values: safety, workforce protections, and environmental stewardship.

We cannot save lives if AVs do not operate safely or adhere to state and local laws. We cannot create jobs and grow wages if we don't address how AVs may displace workers. We cannot meet our climate goals if AVs lead to more congestion or undermine our bedrock environmental laws.

Congress can bridge these gaps by creating a national roadmap for AVs that establishes robust workforce protections for those whose livelihoods may be harmed by the deployment of AVs, ensures that these technologies are developed and manufactured in the United States, and protects the environment and Americans' rights and safety.

We have to act thoughtfully to address all these issues, and that's why we're having this hearing today.

Thank you.