

Statement of Ranking Member Greg Walden
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce
Hearing on “Legislation to Make Cars in America Safer.”
July 24, 2019
As Prepared for Delivery

Good morning, and thank you Madame Chair for holding today’s hearing focused on auto safety.

Each year, we lose almost 37,000 people on our roads, in no small part due to impaired driving. In fact, since January 2000, more than 200,000 people have died from impaired driving. Whether it be alcohol, marijuana, or opioids, the consumption of drugs is making our roads less safe.

Alcohol-impaired driving remains a serious problem and one that cuts far too many lives short. But drug-impaired driving has also taken hold on our roadways. To be clear, you cannot drive safely if you are impaired. It is illegal to drive while under the influence of marijuana, opioids, or any potentially impairing drug, even if the drug has been legally prescribed. Driving while impaired by any substance – legal or illegal – puts drivers and those who share the road with them in danger.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is getting the word out about the dangers of driving after consuming drugs through its “If You Feel Different, You Drive Different” and “Drive High, Get a DUI” campaigns.

Today, we will discuss two measures that will help advance NHTSA’s efforts to combat impaired driving introduced by Rep. Rodgers and Dr. Bucshon.

The first bill, the Combatting Impaired Driving Act of 2019, introduced by Dr. Bucshon and Ms. Dingell, authorizes important funding to NHTSA to conduct research on impaired driving, including drug-impaired driving. The more NHTSA can focus on this issue, the more we can learn about its unique challenges and make better, more informed policy decisions.

The second bill, the Impaired Driving Study Act of 2019, introduced by Ms. Rodgers and Mr. McNerney, directs NHTSA to study impaired driving so that we can learn more about the devastating effects marijuana and opioid-impaired driving are having on our roads.

The bill is intended to give NHTSA the flexibility it needs to determine how best to study this issue and requires NHTSA to report to us on the progress of their study as well as any findings.

Under this bill, NHTSA can review different methods to detect drug-impaired driving; work with state and local partners on state-based drug-impaired driving policies; learn the role and extent of drug impairment in motor vehicle accidents; and any other issue NHTSA believes necessary to examine to combat drug-impaired driving in effective and efficient ways.

This study will produce critical information necessary for us to make policy decisions. Saving lives from impaired driving is a bipartisan issue.

I am hopeful we can continue to work together to advance legislation to address this growing crisis of impaired driving on our roads.

Today, I am also interested in learning more about the other bills under consideration today, the Hot Cars Act, introduced by Rep. Ryan, and the PARK IT Act, introduced by Rep.

Schakowsky, which seeks to address the threat of carbon monoxide poisoning from motor vehicles. It is worth noting that last week, we forwarded a bill led by Reps. Kuster and Carter to the House floor to incentivize installing carbon monoxide detectors in homes in order to help avoid these tragedies no matter the source of carbon monoxide.

Again, thank you for holding today's hearing.