

Opening Statement
Chair Jan Schakowsky
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on “Autonomous Vehicles: Promises and Challenges of Evolving Automotive
Technologies”
February 11, 2020

Good morning, thank you for being here to attend our hearing on self-driving cars. In 1966, the year Ralph Nader published “Unsafe At Any Speed”, more than 50,000 Americans died in auto crashes. In 1966, President Johnson signed the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act, which required the adoption of new or upgraded vehicle safety standards and created an agency, NHTSA, to enforce them and supervise safety recalls. Since then, the country’s population has grown by more than 100 million, while auto fatalities have dropped to **thirty-six thousand, five hundred sixty**.

This represents significant progress, but much of this progress is thanks to safety advocates who have pushed regulators to require a host of new or stronger safety requirements— often after stiff opposition from industry — that bring technologies like airbags, antilock brakes, electronic stability control and, recently, rearview cameras to market for ALL consumers.

So, while it’s refreshing to hear industry pushing for a law that can help them more rapidly deploy a technology, they say will save even more lives, one can understand why many are skeptical.

Many associated safety technologies—such as automatic emergency braking, lane departure warnings, and pedestrian detection—exist today and can dramatically reduce the number of automobile fatalities and injuries every year.

But deployment of these safety features is slow, and often reserved for those willing to pay a premium for advanced safety features.

Beyond the scope of this Committee’s jurisdiction, however, are serious questions about the impact mass deployment of self-driving cars will have on the economy, specifically the workforce. Congress must be very thoughtful and move with an abundance of caution when it comes to passage of legislation that has the potential to cause mass labor displacement.

Recall 1994, when Congress passed NAFTA. Nearly everyone in the labor movement said that Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) was ill-equipped to handle the job displacement that was predicted, and yet many insisted on pushing through the agreement and fixing TAA later. By the time President Bush supported Chinese Accession in the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Federal government had done next to nothing to support workers who had already taken it on the chin from NAFTA. Chinese Accession into the WTO meant workers got walloped again, while corporate executives saw their stock options balloon. We can’t make mistakes like those ones

again. The job before this subcommittee is to work on legislation that will significantly reduce fatalities and injuries from vehicle accidents. This means smaller steps that can be done immediately and longer-term opportunities like self-driving cars. It's my expectation that other committees will work to mitigate the economic damage AVs could cause.

I thank the witnesses for being here and yield the rest of my time to my friend and colleague, Mike Doyle.