



Under Trump, Congress could change fuel economy rules

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Congress could help the Trump administration change fuel economy rules to make compliance easier for automakers.

Oklahoma Sen. Jim Inhofe, the top Republican on the Environment and Public Works Committee, told E&E News yesterday that he would be in favor of changing fuel economy rules through legislation. He said he believed Republicans could muster enough votes because they will control both Congress and the White House.

"We're pretty optimistic there," said Inhofe, who is stepping down as committee chairman at year's end. "There might be a few that might disagree with that issue, but I think you're going to see support."

A fierce critic of U.S. EPA's greenhouse gas regulations, he called the Trump transition team's calls for a review of the standards a "good idea." He said introducing a bill next year is not on his agenda for now, but that he will wait and see what President-elect Donald Trump will want to do.

"Anytime you mandate something that the majority of people are opposed to, particularly with a background of America being a country of choice, he needs to take another look at that, and I want to be there by his side when he does it," Inhofe said.

Sen. Gary Peters (D-Mich.) said earlier this month that he was open to taking a fresh look at the fuel economy standards.

"We're looking at all the proposals out there," he said. "No decisions have been made on any of that, but those kinds of discussions are going on."

Trump's promises to roll back Obama-era regulations in favor of manufacturing and energy production have longtime EPA foes and the auto industry rejoicing. Two days after the election, the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers asked Trump for tweaks in the rules that would weaken them ([E&ENews PM](#), Nov. 10). Stocks have soared for automakers like General Motors and Fiat Chrysler Automobiles.

Carmakers have met or beat the standards every year so far, but they say the tightening targets are making it difficult for manufacturers.

Trump could weaken the fuel economy program in a number of ways, including through an existing and ongoing review process, a new agency rule, a delay in setting new standards or legislation.

Trump adviser questions CAFE

The fuel economy rules are the government's most substantive policy to tackle continually increasing greenhouse gas emissions from transportation, which overcame the power sector as the country's top emitter this year.

Consumers are buying more trucks and SUVs than small passenger cars in a period of low gas prices, offsetting some of the benefits of the rules. EPA expects a fleetwide fuel efficiency of between 50 and 52.6 mpg by 2025, lower than the previously projected 54.5 mpg. Weaker fuel economy rules would make it easier for automakers to sell larger vehicles.

President Obama has set increasingly strict fuel efficiency targets for passenger vehicles and heavy-duty trucks throughout his presidency, calling it a central part of his climate change agenda. National security experts and consumer advocates have said the standards are also an important tool to decrease the country's dependence on foreign oil and save Americans money.

A senior Trump policy adviser, John Mashburn, [told](#) *The Wall Street Journal* that the incoming administration would review fuel economy and emissions standards to make sure they do not burden manufacturers and consumers.

"It is important to remember that this particular program was first put in place as a way to reduce our nation's dependence on foreign oil, not for purposes of global warming regulation," Mashburn told the *Journal*.

Trump has not mentioned the fuel economy rules specifically. The president-elect has said he would focus on rules targeted at fossil fuel production like the Clean Power Plan and methane emissions regulations.

But he will have to decide what to do with fuel economy rules early in his presidency. Agencies are currently reviewing the standards as part of a previously agreed-upon process and will have to decide by April 2018 whether to tighten, loosen or maintain the standards.

Bigger changes to the program are not out of the question.

This year, automakers have lobbied both the present and incoming administrations to tweak the standards, though they have not publicly asked for their elimination.

They want more alignment between the standards set by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, as required by energy legislation signed in 2007 by President George W. Bush,

and EPA, which regulates greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles under the Clean Air Act. Environmentalists have said those changes would increase vehicle pollution by making compliance easier.

Congress could also pass legislation changing or eliminating the overall fuel economy program. Environmentalists said they do not believe that is likely because fuel economy has largely received bipartisan support.

"Legislation would need to get by a filibuster, which has always been a tough thing to do on this issue," said Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Campaign and a longtime defender of the fuel economy rules. "Even if you don't care about environment or are hostile to environmental goals, would you really want to increase America's oil dependence or what customers pay at pump by weakening the rules that lessen both?"

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