

Detroit Free Press



“The carmakers claim the clean-car standard will hurt industry profits and jobs. ... Those are alternative facts,” said Dan Becker, director of Safe Climate Campaign, a Washington, D.C.-based environmental advocacy group. While agreeing with automakers that only a relatively small number of cars currently meet the standards, he said the technology is still there to be more widely introduced with years to go.

“It’s shameful that Mr. Trump and the automakers are plotting to deny (those cars) to Americans,” he said.

Reports of rolling back m.p.g. standards draw criticism

[Todd Spangler](#), Detroit Free Press Published 12:26 p.m. ET March 7, 2017

WASHINGTON — Democratic U.S. senators and environmental groups today blasted plans said to be in the works to roll back tougher fuel-use standards for American vehicles, arguing that they will return automakers to pre-recession policies that led to the near-collapse of the domestic industry.

Sens. Ed Markey of Massachusetts, Tom Carper of Delaware and Jeff Merkley of Oregon held a call with reporters reacting to media reports that the Trump administration could announce a decision to relax fuel standards put in place five years ago.

Before former President Barack Obama left office, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said it would leave in place rules requiring the nation’s fleet of light-duty vehicles to meet an average standard of 54.5 m.p.g. by the 2025 model year, despite automakers’ claims that it doesn’t take into account available technology and marketplace demand.

Auto groups have been lobbying President Donald Trump to roll back the standard and he has met privately with American automakers. His new EPA chief, Scott Pruitt, is believed to be on board.

But Markey and others argued today that efforts to increase fuel mileage in American vehicles — especially under the agreement reached in 2011 between automakers, federal agencies and the State of California, which has long insisted on tougher standards — was perhaps the “single largest step America has ever taken to reduce climate pollution,” reducing millions of tons of carbon emissions, and that undoing it would harm the environment.

Under those rules, as well as those enacted earlier under the Obama administration, the fleet average for light-duty cars and trucks is set to increase from a combined 34.1 m.p.g. in the 2016 model year to 54.5 m.p.g. in 2025. However, because of technical complexities in the way the standards are set and measured, as well as the credits automakers receive for actions such as producing alternative-fuel vehicles or using more efficient air-conditioning, real-world m.p.g. results in cars and trucks — and on new-vehicle window stickers — tend to be about 20% lower than the standards.

The combined standard is also made up of more specific standards for cars and trucks of different sizes, with automakers expected to hit specific targets based on expected sales.

Markey and the others also said that while a change to future standards might give American automakers leeway to sell more profitable, larger vehicles, that practice was one of the biggest problems with the industry prior to 2008-09, when General Motors and Chrysler used billions of dollars in taxpayer investment to survive. Higher fuel prices hurt sales of bigger vehicles, they said, and American car companies were in no position to react with more fuel-efficient vehicles.

Since being rescued by the government, said Markey, the industry has notched record sales and added hundreds of thousands of jobs as fuel efficiency has increased — though automakers have noted that alternative-fuel vehicles have been slow to catch on.

“Making this U-turn on fuel economy is the wrong way to go,” Markey said.

“The carmakers claim the clean-car standard will hurt industry profits and jobs. ... Those are alternative facts,” said Dan Becker, director of Safe Climate Campaign, a Washington, D.C.-based environmental advocacy group. While agreeing with automakers that only a relatively small number of cars currently meet the standards, he said the technology is still there to be more widely introduced with years to go.

“It’s shameful that Mr. Trump and the automakers are plotting to deny (those cars) to Americans,” he said.

“The automakers agreed to these standards. ... They were key architects of them,” said Ken Kimmell, president of the Union of Concerned Scientists. “They’re working.”

Critics of proposals to relax the future standards also complained about any potential effort to withdraw waivers that allowed California and 12 other states to enact tougher standards. If, as part of a change by the Trump administration, the federal government attempts to limit those states' ability to set their own standards, it almost certainly would lead to legal action by California and the others.

But long before the 2012 agreement to harmonize standards, automakers argued against state-by-state standards for fuel efficiency, saying they created a patchwork of regulations that could hurt customer choice and sales.

Contact Todd Spangler: 703-854-8947 or at tspangl@freepress.com. Follow him on Twitter at @tspangl.

<http://www.freep.com/story/news/2017/03/07/reports-trump-rolling-back-mpg-standards-draw-criticism/98849690/>