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Senators call on EPA not to roll back mpg standards

[Melissa Nann Burke, Detroit News Washington Bureau](#) 5:39 p.m. ET March 7, 2017
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Washington — Eleven Democratic senators on Tuesday called on the Environmental Protection Agency not to roll back federal fuel-economy standards for cars and trucks, arguing the move would harm consumers and lead to costly litigation.

The EPA and U.S. Department of Transportation under President Donald Trump are expected as early as this week to reopen the review of greenhouse gas emission standards that require automakers to produce car and truck fleets averaging more than 50 miles per gallon by 2025. Corporate Average Fuel Economy standards ramp up incrementally from the 35-plus miles per gallon required for 2017 models already in showrooms.

The fuel-economy standards were supposed to be reviewed in 2018, but after a brief comment period that ended Dec. 30, the EPA pushed through portions of the regulations just days before Trump took office. The Auto Alliance, a trade group which represents automakers including the Detroit Three, has said this “unnecessarily politicized” the midterm review of the emission standards by moving to finalize the regulations ahead of schedule.

The senators, led by Ed Markey of Massachusetts, [wrote](#) to EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, saying the auto emissions standards are both economically feasible and technologically achievable for the industry, and that they enhance national security by reducing the nation’s reliance on foreign oil.

“They will benefit consumers, saving them billions of dollars at the pump and reduce our carbon pollution. It is critical that they remain in place,” the senators wrote.

The lawmakers stressed that automakers have “thrived” under CAFE standards, adding 700,000 jobs since 2009 when implementation of more stringent standards began; sales have grown for seven years straight to a record high in 2016.

Markey was joined by Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York, Dick Durbin of Illinois, Tom Carper of Delaware, Dianne Feinstein of California, Jeff Merkley of Oregon, Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, Maria Cantwell of Washington, Chris Van Hollen of Maryland, Bernie Sanders of Vermont, and Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island.

Cathy Milbourn, a spokeswoman for the EPA, declined to comment Tuesday, “since the agency has not announced how it will proceed on the vehicle emission standards.”

The auto industry has pushed for the rollback. Last month, the Auto Alliance [urged the EPA](#) to withdraw the vehicle emissions standards for cars and light trucks for model years 2022-2025.

Automakers estimate that under the stringent targets locked in by the Obama administration in January, fewer than 3.5 percent of new vehicles would meet the 2025 standards.

“Even under EPA’s optimistic estimates, the automotive industry will have to spend a staggering \$200 billion between 2012 and 2025 to comply,” Mitch Bainwol, the president of the Auto Alliance, wrote to Pruitt in February.

Environmental groups support the more stringent standards, citing climate and consumer protections.

They said reopening the review of fuel economy rule could lead to a legal fight with California and 12 other states that have stricter standards for fuel efficiency. California received a waiver from the federal government allowing it to enforce its tougher standards.

“If the administration teams up with the auto companies to weaken these standards or challenge the California’s ability to protect its own citizens, the environmental community and I presume the state of California, as well, will sue,” said Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Campaign. “I think these standards will end up winning the day.”

Markey said that attacking the California waiver could mean “chaos” and further uncertainty for automakers.

“The auto companies don’t want 50 state standards,” Markey said. “If the EPA is going to retreat, that pre-existing waiver still sits there for the states to be able to act, and the bottom line is attacking the California waiver is a recipe for chaos for the car companies because those states will not go easily, and they know it.”

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