

# Clean-Car Battle Shows How to Fight for Emissions Reduction

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*Becker and Gerstenzang take some pages out of the playbook successfully used to obtain tough new auto pollution and mileage standards to suggest next steps in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the United States.*

President Obama signaled in his State of the Union address



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(<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/02/12/remarks-president-state-union-address>) that global warming holds a top spot on his second-term agenda. To rescue a climate under assault, the lessons of the fight that has delivered tough new auto pollution standards

use.

Those clean-car rules will cut gasoline use in half, create 500,000 jobs, and boost energy independence. The safeguards will deliver new cars in 2025 that average an impressive 54.5 mpg. Most important, compared with 2010 models, these cars will halve their emissions of carbon dioxide, the major heat-trapping pollutant.

The program represents the biggest single step of any nation against global warming. The take-away from the president's action is unmistakable: We can cut fossil fuel emissions.

But scientists say the United States must make far deeper cuts in carbon dioxide emissions than those of the auto program to avoid the disruption of ever more severe climate change - think Superstorm Sandy ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/29/superstorm-sandy-3-months-later\\_n\\_2571732.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/29/superstorm-sandy-3-months-later_n_2571732.html)), the continuing drought (<http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>), rising sea levels and the inexorable spread of tropical insects and disease.

We will accomplish this next, critical step by using electricity and oil more efficiently, ultimately lowering demand until we can meet our needs with wind and solar power. As renewable energy is phased in, natural gas may help replace heavily polluting coal, but only if developed and transported cleanly and safely (<http://www.dangersoffracking.com/>).

The waves of extreme weather gripping the nation align disturbingly with scientists' warnings that this is what global warming will look like (<http://www.nrdc.org/globalwarming/fcons/fcons1.asp>). The auto campaign provides three key lessons on how to take the next steps to fight it.

### **Lesson 1: Choose the right goal and stick to it.**

The clean-car campaign set an ambitious goal in 1989: Cut deeply into global warming pollution by wringing oil from the economy. In 2002, President George W. Bush inched up standards for SUVs and other light trucks by 2.4 miles per gallon, to 24 mpg. He left the car standards unchanged. But science showed us that a safe climate demanded much more.

Not settling for negligible progress, environmentalists pressed for improvements that would genuinely reduce emissions. The stringent new 54.5 mpg standard shows it was worth fighting on.

*Next step: Cut oil use in half over the next 20 years and slash emissions from power plants.*

Greater efficiency and new technologies will be central to achieving these goals. Utilities must switch from highly polluting coal ([http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/03/world/emissions-of-carbon-dioxide-hit-record-in-2011-researchers-say.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/03/world/emissions-of-carbon-dioxide-hit-record-in-2011-researchers-say.html?_r=0)) to renewable energy - wind and solar.

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oil must be made more efficient - whether trucks and airplanes or furnaces and factories.

## **Lesson 2: Fight the fight you can win.**

In the auto campaign, circumventing Washington was crucial.

For years, the auto industry lobbied successfully against strong national fuel economy rules. After car mileage standards reached 27.5 mpg in 1989, Congress and three presidents refused to increase them. So, environmentalists moved the campaign to politically receptive California, figuring that stronger pollution rules in the nation's largest auto market - and eventually in other states - would force car makers to relent.

The campaign found an advocate in then-Assemblywoman Fran Pavley (<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/greenspace/2010/04/fuel-economy-global-warming.html>), a Democrat representing a Los Angeles suburb, who shepherded to enactment the first statewide auto emissions cuts.

With environmentalists' encouragement, 12 other states signed on. Automakers sued. The Supreme Court ruled against the companies ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massachusetts\\_v.\\_Environmental\\_Protection\\_Agency](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massachusetts_v._Environmental_Protection_Agency)), clearing the way for tough federal as well as state standards.

*Next step: Shift the focus to the Obama administration and urge the president to adopt tough EPA standards controlling power plant pollution.*

This is a fight we can win. At a minimum, power plant standards should cut emissions by at least one-quarter by 2020 - a course we explored in an op-ed in *The New York Times* (<http://safeclimatecampaign.org/commentaries>) *The New York Times*. The Natural Resources Defense Council says this would cost \$4 billion (<http://www.nrdc.org/air/pollution-standards/>), but save \$25 billion to \$60 billion in 2020. The president can establish these safeguards under the Clean Air Act authority he used to set car standards (<http://www.epa.gov/otaq/climate/documents/42of12051.pdf>).

The environmental victory in California was critical to the auto industry's decision to drop its opposition to national emissions and mileage standards. Facing stricter standards in California that could get tougher over time, automakers eventually agreed to negotiate with the Obama administration. The result? A strong program that car makers came to see as a step toward a thriving future.

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fight global warming may help them modernize - and achieve long-term economic health.

### **Lesson 3: Hold polluters accountable.**

While automakers fought the states in court, environmentalists chastised the industry for selling guzzlers (<http://www.commondreams.org/pressreleases/feb99/022599f.htm>) that raised consumers' costs and subsidized oil oligarchs. They pilloried Ford for producing vehicles that averaged worse mileage than the Model T (<http://www.wanttoknow.info/030604detroitnewsepaaveragempg1.shtml>) and General Motors for its Hummer. Image-conscious automakers cringed.

But the clean-car campaign also applauded technology leaders, turning the hybrid Prius into a rolling advertisement for good corporate citizenship. The message: If Toyota could build a clean car, why couldn't Chrysler?

With auto manufacturers' reputations corroding and the Supreme Court ruling against the companies, Nissan broke ranks, supporting improved standards.

*Next step: Help Americans understand how much the oil, utility and coal industries jeopardize our security, harm our health and raid our wallets - as well as damage our atmosphere.*

Federal subsidies to the oil industry only encourage further reliance on gasoline. By ending them, the federal government will help end our oil addiction - and save taxpayers at least \$4 billion a year (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/02/us/politics/obama-calls-for-an-end-to-subsidies-for-oil-and-gas-companies.html>).

Global warming is already wreaking havoc with the planet and threatening far greater destruction than we have already seen. But the clean-car campaign proves that the United States can successfully tackle this environmental crisis. It provides a road map that we can use to pressure the polluting industries to change - just as the car makers say they are overhauling their operations to compete in the 21st century.

In 2010, the auto industry was struggling. Facing stringent state rules, attacks on its performance and integrity, and internal divisions, it accepted strong standards it had claimed for two decades it could not meet. Today, the oil and utility industries insist they can't stop poisoning the atmosphere. They, too, are wrong.

To meet the new auto rules, manufacturers will use advanced internal combustion engines and transmissions, and strong, lightweight materials. They will build more hybrids and some electric vehicles. The electric power business must follow suit.

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improvements wherever we burn oil and generate electricity. The auto fight teaches us that tinkering around the edges won't work. We must set bold goals and fight to meet them as if the whole world is at stake. Because it is.

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