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EPA's Margo Oge Retires Following U.S. Fuel-Economy Rule

Angela Greiling Keane Sep 05, 2012 1:47 am ET

(Updates with Oge e-mail, comments about her tenure starting in third paragraph.)

Sept. 4 (Bloomberg) -- The U.S. official who led the writing of standards to make automakers double vehicle fuel economy by 2025 said she's retiring, a week after her agency released the final rule.

Margo Oge, 63, director of the Environmental Protection Agency's office of transportation and air quality, disclosed her plans today, Alisha Johnson, an EPA spokeswoman, said in an interview. Oge has worked at the EPA for more than 30 years, spending 18 in the air quality office.

"I feel it's time to start a new chapter," Oge wrote in an e-mail to EPA employees. "I haven't decided on exactly what yet -- first I want to catch my breath and share time with my family -- then dive into new challenges in the new year."

Oge, who said she'll step down at the end of the month, leads the U.S. office responsible for setting standards for emissions from cars and vehicles ranging from airplanes and buses to snowmobiles and forklifts. She has testified before Congress to defend her agency's support for allowing gasoline sold for cars to contain as much as 15 percent ethanol, a change auto-industry groups oppose.

The EPA and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration on Aug. 28 released the final version of a rule setting fuel-economy mandates from 2017 to 2025.

The standards, projected to cost automakers \$136 billion to comply with while saving consumers as much as \$451 billion in fuel costs, follow a rule that took effect this year setting fuel-economy rules through 2016.

Thick Skin

Together, the two rules force automakers selling passenger vehicles in the U.S. to double the average fuel economy of their fleets.

Oge has won praise from both environmental advocates and the industries she regulated.

"Margo is first and foremost a very conscientious environmental advocate," Jo Cooper, former head of Toyota Motor Corp.'s Washington office, said in an interview last year. "Margo is tough, tough but willing to listen. That's what it takes to be a regulator. You have to have pretty thick skin."

While cabinet secretaries are the names in the news when an agency releases a rule, Oge's a key behind-the-scenes decision maker in Washington, Dan Becker, director of the Washington-based Safe Climate Campaign, said in an interview last year.

"She is one of those people who the American people probably don't know about," Becker said. "I think most people believe decisions get made somewhere in the government and they don't know where and they don't know how. I

think they would probably be surprised and impressed that someone with the experience and knowledge that Margo Oge has is the kind of person who is making these decisions.”

--Editors: Bernard Kohn, Daniel Enoch

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