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# Guess Who Doesn't Want the EPA "Padlocked"? Detroit, That's Who

By *Jim Motavalli* | August 19, 2011

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*Michele Bachmann: Time to padlock the EPA*

The EPA is the [new bogeyman among GOP presidential contenders](#), who are uniting around a common complaint that the agency's regulations are strangling business and killing jobs. While the politicians frequently cite the auto

industry as one of EPA's biggest victims, closing down the agency might just create the Big Three's worst nightmare — an uneven playing field of varying state regulations that would make it very hard to do business. The auto industry [employs approximately 880,000 workers](#), down by more than 400,000 since 2000. It's convenient to think those jobs were the victims of an over-zealous regulatory climate in the Obama years, but most were lost before he took office, and a recession and market forces (including a wholesale shift away from profit-making SUVs) were the main culprits. If the industry is now on a path to producing more fuel-efficient cars, it's not just because the EPA is asking for 54.5 mpg by 2025, but because consumers want to buy them.

### **A steady course**

Presented with the thesis that little would change for the auto industry without the EPA, **Greg Martin**, **General Motors'** Washington spokesman, said "I wouldn't argue with that." Would the plug-in hybrid Volt have been built without the EPA? "You bet," he said, adding:

As recent sales trends indicate, fuel economy is important to our customers, and therefore it's important to us. We've made terrific progress with the Volt and the Cruze and others, and we intend to keep the pedal to the floor on fuel efficiency.

### **A big takeout target**

The EPA has long been on hit list of not only Tea Party Republicans but also more traditional conservatives, and they frequently point to the auto industry as its principal victim. "Say goodbye to cars and trucks as you know them," said the **Heritage Foundation**, which [claimed that the 54.5 mpg agreement for 2025 would cost 220,000 jobs and add \\$10,000 to the cost of a new car](#).

But, of course, the industry [agreed to the 2025 goals](#) (though not without some maneuvering), and the 35.5 mpg 2016 goal before that. And they did it to avoid a tangled network of conflicting state regulation — exactly what they would face without an EPA. When **Senator Lisa Murkowski** (R-Alaska) proposed taking away the EPA's power to regulate greenhouse gas last year, the **Auto Alliance** (representing 12 carmakers) [opposed her](#) — because it didn't want to wreck its agreement with the feds.

**Wade Newton**, an Alliance spokesman, told me that having the EPA "deactivated/disassembled/restricted" is "not our position."

### **Readying the locks**

But as Job One, Presidential aspirant **Michele Bachmann** would close the EPA. At a rally in Iowa, she opined:

I guarantee you the EPA will have doors locked and lights turned off and they will only be about conservation.

It's unclear how an agency that was padlocked could be about anything at all, let alone conservation, but her opinion is widely shared by her rivals as red meat in primary states. **Newt Gingrich**, also in Iowa, called the EPA "a very expensive bureaucracy that across the board makes it harder to solve problems," and said it should be eliminated. **Rick Perry** wants an immediate moratorium on all environmental regulations.

**Ron Paul** wants environmental disputes settled by the states, but again that's exactly what the auto industry wants to avoid. Its greatest fear is California leading 12 other states in a very green direction, while the rest follow totally different guidelines. It means building cars with dramatically different drivetrains for specific states, and creates imponderable delivery headaches. **Gloria Bergquist**, a spokeswoman for the Alliance, told me:

We want to avoid a patchwork of different regulations, and that's why we supported the integrated 2012-16 program.

Many of the politicians calling on the federal government to butt out of the auto industry's business [are on record as opposing the federal bailout](#) of **Chrysler** and GM. It's uncertain if there would even be a domestic industry without federal intervention, which Bush also supported. Well, **Ford** would still be alive, and probably thriving without much competition.

### **Keeping the industry honest**

**Dan Becker**, the safe climate campaigner at the **Center for Auto Safety**, points out that environmental regulation has played a big role in prodding the industry to innovate and keep up with foreign competition. He told me:

Before the Supreme Court ordered EPA to develop protections against global warming pollution from cars, automakers pressured its other regulator, the Transportation Department, to leave them alone, which it largely did for decades. This led two of the Detroit Three to fall behind Asian auto companies, lose market share and go bankrupt. Proposals to padlock EPA would only protect the automakers to death again, not to mention what would happen to those of us with lungs instead of transmissions.

The fuel economy regulations are the big ticket items but EPA also regulates many things that consumers don't see, like emissions from paint used by industry and auto body shops. As someone with lungs who worked for many years right next to an auto shop painting booth, I'm grateful for 40CFR63 Subpart HHHHHH of the National Emission Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants.

Here's Bachmann on video calling the EPA "the job-killing organization of America." Note rival candidate **Rick Santorum** agreeing with her as she calls for its elimination:



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