

HUFFPOST

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Jerry Brown: California Won’t Roll Back Auto Emissions

By: Lucy Nicholson

WASHINGTON — California Gov. Jerry Brown (D) on Tuesday expressed confidence his state would prevail in a looming legal battle over the Trump administration’s plan to weaken auto fuel economy and emissions standards.

“The idea we’re going to roll back the auto standards is absurd. We’re not going to do that,” Brown told reporters at an event hosted by the National Press Club. “We have the legal horsepower to block the immediate legal moves by the Trump administration.”

Two weeks ago, the Environmental Protection Agency rolled out plans to gut vehicle fuel and emissions standards after complaints from automakers. Those 2012 standards, a compromise between California and federal regulators, require vehicles to average 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025, nearly doubling today’s benchmark.

Brown argued that the world auto market, especially China and Europe, demands that U.S. carmakers reduce emissions, not allow more pollution.

“They’re not going to sell cars in China if they don’t have zero-emission vehicles,” he said. “This is just another temporary kerfuffle where the newsies play around with these things. But the hard facts on the ground are we have to intensify, increase, our vehicle emission standards and not weaken them and go in the other direction.”

U.S. automakers, reeling from the financial crisis and subsequent bailout by taxpayers, agreed to the 2012 rules in part because they set national standards, avoiding the need to manufacture one set of vehicles to meet California’s strict standards, and another set for looser requirements in the remaining 70 percent of the U.S. auto market.

But carmakers pushed for relaxing the rules under President Donald Trump, complaining that lower fuel prices were boosting sales of gas-guzzling SUVs and trucks, and that electric and hybrid vehicles encouraged by the regulations weren’t selling.

Automakers, their critics say, prefer to sell gas guzzlers because that’s where the money is. Each \$73,000 Cadillac Escalade, for example, nets \$35,000 in profit, according to The Detroit News. Electric vehicles, meanwhile, are only half as profitable as cars with combustion engines, a Daimler executive said last year. It’s no wonder that American automakers devoted much of their coveted Super Bowl advertising slots this year to pickup trucks and SUVs.

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Brown said he was disappointed that people in Washington and elsewhere seemed to be “consumed by nonsense” rather than by the threat of climate change.

“People are asleep,” he said. “When you pick up the paper or turn on cable news, you’d think its another planet. It’s all about the nonsense of Washington, and carbon emissions are growing, and we’ve gotta radically turn that around or the migrations you see now are going to be child’s play. We’re going to have more conflicts, more terrorism, more insecurity because of climate disruption.”

Brown, 80, is California's longest-serving governor. He's barred by term limits from running again, but promised it's too early to "ride into the sunset." But he seemed to dismiss the prospect of a presidential run in 2020.

"I can't think of anything less attractive than a Democratic presidential primary," he said.