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EPA Overturns Emission Regulations, Ford Expresses Doubts

By: Ali Hussain

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt announced on April 2 that he will revoke Obama-era standards requiring cars and light trucks sold in the United States to average more than 50 miles per gallon by 2025, despite science backing up the car-efficiency rules.

The move was endorsed by the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, whose members produce 70 percent of the cars and automobiles sold in the United States. The group estimated that it is more realistic to expect the goal to be 40 mpg. Real-world estimates put that even lower, at 36 mpg.

The industry claims to be concerned about motorist safety, technology lapses and the unpopularity of cleaner cars. An April 3 article published by Scientific American titled "EPA to Roll Back Car-Efficiency Rules, Despite Science That Supports Them" said, "Those arguments ... were often challenged ... by agency specialists under the past administration and by environmentalists."

This issue may sound familiar. Green activists want to uphold ambitious environmental standards while car manufacturers such as Mercedes-Benz, which do not meet the standards, wish to keep their standards lax and continue down their previously held paths.

This issue, however, differentiates itself from other situations because many car manufacturers want more modest changes than the dramatic rollbacks the EPA wants, according to a Christian Science Monitor article titled "Trump's challenge to fuel-efficient car standards: an uphill battle." The article further mentioned that "Ford Motor Co. last week cautioned the Trump administration against going too far."

Pruitt expressed that he wants to launch a national standard for greenhouse gas emissions. He also promised to review the waiver that permitted California to create its own standards. The Clean Air Act allows California to set its own emissions limits and the state "has threatened to sue if its waiver is revoked and it is blocked from imposing stricter targets." This has larger implications because 12 other states also echo California's standards.

Pruitt stated, "The Obama administration's determination was wrong." He added, "Obama's EPA cut the Midterm Evaluation process short with politically charged expediency, made assumptions about the standards that didn't comport with reality, and set the standards too high."

Officials in California scorned the decisions made by the EPA head.

Mary Nichols, chair of the California Air Resources Board, stated, "This is a politically motivated effort to weaken clean vehicle standards with no documentation, evidence or law to back up that decision."

She elaborated that these decisions would "demolish" the nation's progress toward cleaner cars and that "EPA's action, if implemented, will worsen people's health with degraded air quality and undermine regulatory certainty for automakers."

Nichols also suggested that a potential legal battle would ensue. Contenders can sue to terminate the weakening rules and California can sue if the EPA discards the waiver.

The rollback of regulation poses threats to the environment. The Paris climate agreement reveals global warming is a threat to the state of life on earth.

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Dave Cooke, a senior vehicles analyst at the Union of Concerned Scientists in Washington, additionally mentions how self-driving cars contribute to this issue. It is unclear whether self-driving cars will decrease or increase number of miles traveled. A Christian Science Monitor article stated that Cooke argues this exemplifies how fuel-economy rules are “only one piece of a larger puzzle.”

Cooke said, “The industry is global in nature at this point ... but so is the problem of climate change... We are a culture built around the automobile in large respects.”