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“The automaker CEOs will likely meet with Trump to tell him they don’t want a war with California and the other clean car states since those states will regulate them long after Trump leaves office,” Becker told Automotive World. “I think there could be a negotiation, but it isn’t clear what will happen. Vehicle manufacturers don’t want two different rules.” He noted that GM’s Vice President Mark Reuss previously told AP that he’d rather have the existing standards that he doesn’t like than two standards – a weaker one he does like and the existing standards maintained by the clean car states. “Maintaining the current standards would be a fine outcome,” suggested Becker.

EPA vs clean car states: emissions showdown looms

By: Megan Lampinen

As promised, a handful of US states are fighting the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) efforts to weaken future fuel economy standards. California is leading a coalition of like-minded states seeking to gain back ground lost when the Trump administration took over.

‘Inappropriate’ standards

The Obama administration had closed the Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) for car and light truck fuel economy for model years 2022-2025 just days before the new administration took over. The step was designed to secure proposed standards, as Trump’s government was expected to push for a more relaxed approach on emissions. It did. Under the leadership of Trump-appointed Scott Pruitt, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) made the controversial decision in March last year to reopened the MTE.

In April this year, Pruitt announced the completion of MTE review, concluding that the current standards were “not appropriate” and needed to be revised. “The Obama Administration’s determination was wrong,” Pruitt stated. “Obama’s EPA cut the MTE process short with politically charged expediency, made assumptions about the standards that didn’t comport with reality, and set the standards too high.”

He spoke specifically against California’s decision to set its own, tighter standards, noting: “Cooperative federalism doesn’t mean that one state can dictate standards for the rest of the country. EPA will set a national standard for greenhouse gas emissions that allows auto manufacturers to make cars that people both want and can afford — while still expanding the environmental and safety benefits of newer cars. It is in America’s best interest to have a national standard, and we look forward to partnering with all states, including California, as we work to finalise that standard.”

Opposition

In response, the group states are bringing legal action against the EPA. Specifically, they have filed a lawsuit in the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia challenging its decision on the 2022-2025 standards.

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Becker’s group has been vocal in its criticism of the EPA’s actions. So have plenty of others. California Governor Jerry Brown commented: “The states joining today’s lawsuit represent 140 million people who simply want cleaner and more efficient cars.

This phalanx of states will defend the nation's clean car standards to boost gas mileage and curb toxic air pollution." He noted that the states included in the lawsuit represent 43% of the US automotive market.

"The standards we are fighting to protect were adopted in 2012 and don't take effect until 2022. They were a lifeline thrown to an industry that was in trouble and desperate for stability. They were based on the best judgment of engineers about what technology could achieve. And in fact they are being achieved today, years ahead of the deadlines, because of the good work of the auto industry," said California Air Resources Board Chair Mary Nichols. "But now Administrator Pruitt, based on no new information or facts, wants to roll back all that progress in the name of deregulation. The Final Determination is just the first step but it is intended to provide the legal basis for a decision that has already been made: to halt the progress that regulators and industry have made toward a new generation of vehicles. It does not withstand scrutiny and it will not stand."

The proposal

The EPA not only wants to scale back fuel economy and greenhouse gas standards; it is also determined to take away California's authority to set and enforce its own greenhouse gas standards. US Senator Tom Carper, a top Democrat on the Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee, sent a letter to Pruitt and Elaine Chao, Secretary of the Department of Transportation (DOT), urging them to abandon their "extreme and legally questionable" proposal.

"Such a proposal, if finalised, would harm US national and economic security, undermine efforts to combat global warming pollution, create regulatory and manufacturing uncertainty for the automobile industry and unnecessary litigation, increase the amount of gasoline consumers would have to buy, and runs counter to statements that both of you have made to Members of Congress," Carper wrote.

Among other things, the draft proposed rule, obtained by the committee, shows that DOT and EPA aim to freeze model year 2020 standards through model year 2026 and pre-empt California's authority to designate independent tailpipe greenhouse gas emissions standards under the Energy Policy and Conservation Act (EPCA). Carper describes its aims as "legally questionable, frivolous and fundamentally irresponsible."

Meetings

The government is scheduled to meet with automotive leaders in the next few days to discuss proposals for fuel efficiency standards. Reports claim that management from General Motors, Ford and Toyota will be among those attending.

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