

Environmentalists target Ford over mpg rules

By: Keith Laing

Washington — Four environmental groups are targeting Ford Motor Co. in their campaign to prevent the easing of stringent gas mileage rules under review by President Donald Trump's administration.

In full-page ads running Saturday in The Detroit News and Detroit Free Press, the groups — the Sierra Club, Greenpeace, Safe Climate Campaign and Public Citizen — accuse Ford of working behind the scenes in Washington to convince the Trump administration to roll back the mileage rules, which would require automakers to produce fleets that average over 50 miles per gallon.

The automaker denies it is trying to convince the White House to do any such thing.

The ad's headline, which is superimposed over a photo of a tailpipe spewing exhaust and a blue oval with a stylized script reading "Trump," reads: "Too bad Ford Motor Company's motto of 'Go Further,' doesn't apply to our nation's gas tanks." It goes on to say: "Today, Ford Motor Company celebrates 115 years in business by encouraging Trump to roll back the clean car standards."

Ford pushed back against the ad in a statement to The Detroit News.

"As we have previously said, we continue to support increasing clean car standards through 2025 and are not asking for a rollback," the carmaker said. "Importantly, we want one set of standards nationally, along with additional flexibility to help us provide more affordable options for our customers. We will continue to urge EPA, NHTSA and California to work together and deliver on this standard."

The company and other automakers have pointed out that California and 12 other states currently have higher gas mileage standards than required by the federal government. Carmakers have argued for one national standard so they do not have to produce cars to meet different mileage rules.

California sets its own emissions standards under a waiver included in the 1970 Clean Air Act. A dozen other states have adopted the California rules, accounting for a third of the U.S. auto market.

The federal fuel-economy rules at issue were enacted in 2012 and began taking effect with the 2017 model year. They called for ramping up from the current fleet-wide average of about 35 miles per gallon for cars and trucks, to more than 37 miles per gallon in 2019 and nearly 39 miles per gallon in 2020. The eventual goal of between 50 and 52.6 miles per gallon was set for 2025.

The CAFE rules, intended to reduce dependence on foreign oil and reduce greenhouse gases, were put in place by the Obama administration when gas prices topped \$4 per gallon. The rules were finalized by the Obama administration ahead of schedule in the months after Trump's 2016 win, angering automakers who argued they were promised a mid-term review in 2018.

The review was reinstated by the Trump administration in April, over the objection of environmental and consumer groups who argued that the Obama administration's scientific rationale for preserving the mileage rules was solid.

Carmakers say drivers have demonstrated in recent years that they are less interested in fuel-efficient cars and electric vehicles with gas prices that are now around \$3.

Andrew Linhardt, the deputy director of the Sierra Club's Clean Transportation for All campaign, said, "Ford claimed to be a green company, repeatedly telling us they wanted to put climate action in the fast lane with the clean car standards. But ever since Trump was elected, they've stomped on the brakes, seeking to put climate action in reverse by working to undo these very same standards."

Ford has defended its record on fuel economy against previous attacks from environmental lobbyists in Washington by pointing to a March 27 post by CEO Jim Hackett on Medium.com that said: “We support increasing clean car standards through 2025 and are not asking for a rollback.”

“We want one set of standards nationally, along with additional flexibility to help us provide more affordable options for our customers,” Hackett wrote then.

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