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'We're in favor of keeping the standard' — Ford CEO

By: Maxine Joselow

Ford Motor Co. CEO Jim Hackett this week signaled his opposition to the Trump administration's rollback of Obama-era clean car rules.

Speaking Wednesday to the Midwestern Governors Association in Columbus, Ohio, Hackett acknowledged chanting, sign-waving environmentalists outside the meeting and aligned himself with their cause.

"There's a group of people out there protesting today, the governor and I, about CO2 standards," Hackett said, according to a recording.

He added, "Ford is leading in this regard. ... We're in favor of keeping the standard, not a rollback. We have plans to meet it."

The Trump administration last month outlined a series of options for the car rules. The preferred option was freezing fuel economy standards at 2020 levels through 2026, rather than increasing their stringency each year as President Obama had advocated.

Hackett and Bill Ford, the executive chairman of the company, previously asserted in a March blog post, "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."

But environmentalists viewed the March post with skepticism. They argued that the term "flexibilities" was code for a series of loopholes that, taken together, would have the same effect as a rollback.

Greens celebrated Hackett's remarks this week, which didn't mention flexibilities.

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Still, some observers remained skeptical, noting that the CEOs of major automakers convened at the White House shortly after President Trump's inauguration to discuss softening the Obama-era car rules (Greenwire, Jan. 24).

"It's great news that Ford now claims that it doesn't support the rollback," Madeline Page, clean cars campaign coordinator with Public Citizen, said in a statement. "Now we call on Ford — which has actively worked for the rollback — to be equally as forceful with the White House in making sure the Obama-era rules remain untouched. In addition, Ford should publicly denounce the proposed rollback and urge other automakers to denounce it."

Public hearings next week

Other automakers have been largely silent on the rollback, perplexing observers (Greenwire, July 30). Automakers will have an opportunity to clarify their positions next week, when EPA and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration will hold three public hearings on the cars proposal in Fresno, Calif.;

Dearborn, Mich.; and Pittsburgh.

Gloria Bergquist, spokeswoman for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, said the trade association plans to send representatives to the hearings in Dearborn and Fresno.

Bergquist said the alliance will emphasize some of the following points in its testimony: Climate change is real and automakers are taking action; consumers have more choice than ever in highly energy-efficient vehicles; and there is a growing gap between rising standards and what consumers are buying.

The trade association will also urge the Trump administration and California to find a "commonsense solution," Bergquist said. The administration has proposed rescinding California's Clean Air Act waiver, which allows the state to set tougher vehicle pollution targets than the federal government.

General Motors Co. spokeswoman Dayna Hart said in an email that the company "does not plan to send anyone to testify."

Ford didn't respond to a request for comment on whether it planned to testify, although the hearing in Dearborn will take place across the street from the Ford Product Development Center.

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