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"Weight is generally a bad thing in a vehicle for safety," he said. "Heavier vehicles also tend to inflict more damage on whatever else they hit, whether it's another vehicle or pedestrians or bicyclists. So he has that totally wrong."

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5 things Trump got wrong about the rollback

Maxine Joselow, E&E News reporter

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President Trump made some unusual claims about clean car standards last week. Many of them were false, experts say.

At issue are Trump's remarks at a Friday event described by the White House as a "roundtable on small business and red-tape reduction accomplishments."

His most viral comments concerned toilets. The president complained that "people are flushing toilets 10 times, 15 times, as opposed to once" and directed EPA to study the matter, prompting mockery on Twitter (E&E News PM, Dec. 6).

But toward the middle of his speech, the president pivoted to Obama-era clean car standards, which his administration is in the process of rolling back.

Here are five of Trump's claims about the car rules and why they're inaccurate or misleading, according to economic and transportation experts.

1). The rules 'save a tiny amount of fuel'

Trump said that President Obama introduced the clean car standards in 2012 "in order to save a tiny amount of fuel, of which we have plenty."

He then pointed at a glass of water and quipped,

"Sometimes, it's about that much gasoline."

In fact, the Obama administration estimated the rules would "reduce U.S. oil consumption by 12 billion barrels."

By contrast, Trump's rollback could increase U.S. oil consumption by 57 billion to 73 billion gallons of gasoline through model year 2029, according to an analysis by the Natural Resources Defense Council.

"I don't know what sort of water glass he was using, but it is a significant underestimation of the difference between anything the Trump administration seems prepared to finalize and the rules we have on the books right now," said Dave Cooke, vehicles analyst at the Union of Concerned Scientists.

2. The rules require 'extra computers put on the engine'

Trump, without offering any evidence, said the existing rules would require "extra computers put on the engine."

That remark caused some head-scratching among experts, who said it revealed the president's fundamental lack of understanding of cars and the auto industry writ large.

"If he or his administration had any sense of how the industry worked ... they wouldn't be putting forth this proposal," Cooke said.

Even an analyst at the Heritage Foundation, a traditional ally of the Trump White House, declined to defend the remark.

"I don't necessarily want to defend what the president said," said Nick Loris, deputy director of the Heritage Foundation's Thomas A. Roe Institute for Economic Policy Studies.

3. *The rollback is 'very positive' for the planet*

"From an environmental standpoint, many of the old gas guzzlers are — that are spewing out bad things are going to be coming off the road," Trump said.

"The net result of what happens environmentally is a very positive result," he added.

The NRDC analysis, however, found the rollback would cause car tailpipes to release an additional 634 million metric tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

That's equivalent to running an additional 163 coal-fired power plants for a year, according to EPA's greenhouse gas equivalencies calculator.

"It's not just a do-nothing plan on climate. It's a plan to go backwards," Luke Tonachel, director of NRDC's Clean Vehicles and Fuels Group and author of the analysis, previously told E&E News (Climatewire, Nov. 5).

4. *'Cars are made out of papier-mâché'*

Trump said automakers often achieve increases in fuel efficiency by reducing the weight of their vehicles, which makes them less safe.

The president pledged his rollback would encourage automakers to design heavier cars, which would be "much safer."

"Right now, the cars are made out of papier-mâché," he added, prompting laughter from the audience.

This isn't the first time Trump has made this assertion. He previously said at a September rally in New Mexico: "They make them now like papier-mâché. Somebody touches them and the entire car collapses. When somebody hits me, I want to be in as close to an army tank as possible."

It seems fair to assume that Trump doesn't genuinely believe cars are made from a mixture of paper and adhesive. Rather, he was using the French phrase to argue that lighter cars are less safe.

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Loris, of the Heritage Foundation, went to bat for the president on this point. He cited conclusions from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, which found that certain heavier vehicles provide better crash protection than lighter ones.

Still, Becker noted that even IIHS has deemed the Chevrolet Volt — one of the most fuel-efficient vehicles on the market— safer than several gas-guzzling pickup trucks.

5. The auto industry has shown 'good support'

"People are getting very excited about it. We have some good support with the auto companies," Trump said of the rollback.

"In every way, we think it's going to be terrific. And we have a lot of support from the car industry," he added.

In fact, the auto industry is deeply divided over the Trump administration's approach to clean car rules.

Several major automakers — including General Motors Co. and Fiat Chrysler Automobiles NV — have expressed support for the administration's proposal to block California from setting tougher vehicle emissions rules than the federal government.

But four other manufacturers — Ford Motor Co., Honda Motor Co. Ltd., Volkswagen AG and BMW of North America LLC — reached a voluntary agreement with California this summer to improve fuel efficiency regardless of the rollback.

Trump did acknowledge those four companies have defied his administration, though he was dismissive of their motivations.

"The only ones that don't support are the car companies that want to be politically correct," he said.