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GM drops support for Trump car rules rollback

Maxine Joselow, E&E News reporter

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General Motors Co. today withdrew its support for part of President Trump's rollback of clean car standards and pledged to work with President-elect Joe Biden on boosting electric vehicle adoption.

The move sends a strong signal that corporate America is ready to partner with Biden on key policies to fight climate change, even as Trump refuses to concede that he lost the election.

In a **letter** sent today to the heads of major environmental groups, GM CEO Mary Barra wrote that the automaker was withdrawing from litigation over whether California has the authority to set tougher auto emissions standards than those of the federal government.

GM was one of several automakers that intervened in the lawsuit, titled *Environmental Defense Fund v. Chao*, on behalf of the Trump administration last fall ([Climatewire](#), Oct. 29, 2019).

The administration had argued in the case that California was preempted from setting the tougher rules by the 1975 Energy Policy and Conservation Act.

Environmental groups, led by the Environmental Defense Fund, had asserted that California's standards were a crucial tool in the fight against climate change while saving consumers money at the gas pump.

In her letter, Barra wrote that the automaker now agreed with the green groups. She explicitly connected the company's change of heart to Biden and his vision for electrification.

"President-elect Biden recently said, 'I believe that we can own the 21st century car market again by moving to electric vehicles.' We at General Motors couldn't agree more," Barra wrote.

"We are confident that the Biden Administration, California and the U.S. auto industry, which supports 10.3 million jobs, can collaboratively find the pathway that will deliver an all-electric Future," she added. "To better foster the necessary dialogue, we are immediately withdrawing from the preemption litigation and inviting other automakers to join us."

At least one member of the incoming Biden administration took some credit for the development.

"Glad to see @joebiden's leadership — bringing business and labor together a week ago today — is already encouraging progress," [tweeted](#) Ronald Klain, Biden's incoming chief of staff, referring to the president-elect's meeting last week with Barra, United Auto Workers President Rory Gamble, and other corporate and union leaders.

Reaction

Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-Mich.) today praised GM and urged other automakers to follow suit.

"General Motors did the right thing today by removing their name from this misguided lawsuit. It's time for other automakers to do the same," Dingell said in a statement.

"As I've always said, this issue should never have been litigated in the courts which has only resulted in uncertainty and delay," she added. "We need all stakeholders to come to the table and work on a path forward, which includes automakers, the incoming Administration, California and the environmental community."

Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Transport Campaign at the Center for Biological Diversity, one of the environmental groups that received Barra's letter, echoed this sentiment.

"GM tried to prevent California from protecting its people from tailpipe pollution. They were wrong. And now the other automakers should follow GM and withdraw their support for Trump's attack on clean cars," Becker said in a phone interview this afternoon.

Other observers were unimpressed, noting that GM waited until after the election to make the move.

"? A tad late isn't it ? @GM," Laurie David, an environmental activist and trustee at the Natural Resources Defense Council, [wrote](#) on Twitter.

"Trump lost weeks ago," [tweeted](#) People for Bernie, an account that supported Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders' (I) bid for president.

The road ahead

GM's announcement clears the way for the Biden administration to scrap Trump's rollback and craft aggressive new clean car standards.

But first, the incoming administration will have to grapple with a divided auto industry.

In addition to GM, the automakers that sided with the Trump administration in court included Fiat Chrysler Automobiles NV and Toyota Motor Corp.

By contrast, five other automakers sided with California and reached **voluntary emissions agreements** with the Golden State, including Ford Motor Co. and Honda Motor Co.

Barra ended her letter by hinting at future negotiations to resolve these differences.

"We believe there is now a path to achieve agreement on a national standard and complementary policies to accelerate the electrification of the light-duty transportation sector," she wrote. "This effort is critical to addressing climate change, and we look forward to working together."

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