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Trump signs measure blocking California's ban on new sales of gas-powered cars

By Michelle L. Price, Sophie Austin and Seung Min Kim

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WASHINGTON -- President Donald Trump signed a resolution on Thursday that blocks California's first-in-the-nation rule banning the sale of new gas-powered cars by 2035.

The state quickly announced it will challenge the move in court, with California's attorney general holding a news conference to discuss the planned lawsuit before Trump's signing ceremony ended at the White House.

The resolution was approved by Congress last month and aims to quash the country's most aggressive attempt to phase out gas-powered cars. Trump also signed measures to overturn state policies curbing tailpipe emissions in certain vehicles and smog-forming nitrogen oxide pollution from trucks.

Trump called California's regulations "crazy" at a White House ceremony where he signed the resolutions.

"It's been a disaster for this country," he said.

It comes as the Republican president is mired in a clash with California's Democratic governor, Gavin Newsom, over Trump's move to deploy troops to Los Angeles in response to immigration protests. It's the latest in an ongoing battle between the Trump administration and heavily Democratic California over issues including tariffs, the rights of LGBTQ+ youth and funding for electric vehicle chargers.

The state is already involved in more than two-dozen lawsuits challenging Trump administration actions, and the state's Democratic Attorney General Rob Bonta announced the latest one at a news conference in California.

"The federal government's actions are not only unlawful; they're irrational and wildly partisan," Bonta said. "They come at the direct expense of the health and the well-being of our people."

The three resolutions Trump signed will block California's rule phasing out gas-powered cars and end the sale of new ones by 2035. They will also kill rules that phase out the sale of medium- and heavy-duty diesel vehicles and cut tailpipe emissions from trucks.

In his remarks at the White House, Trump expressed doubts about the performance and reliability of electric vehicles, though he had some notably positive comments about the company owned by Elon Musk, despite their fractured relationship.

"I like Tesla," Trump said.

In remarks that often meandered away from the subject at hand, Trump used the East Room ceremony to also muse on windmills, which he claimed "are killing our

country," the prospect of getting electrocuted by an electric-powered boat if it sank and whether he'd risk a shark attack by jumping as the boat went down.

"I'll take electrocution every single day," the president said.

When it comes to cars, Trump said he likes combustion engines but for those that prefer otherwise, "If you want to buy electric, you can buy electric."

"What this does is it gives us freedom," said Bill Kent, the owner of Kent Kwik convenience stores. Kent, speaking at the White House, said that the California rules would have forced him to install "infrastructure that frankly, is extremely expensive and doesn't give you any return."

The Alliance for Automotive Innovation, which represents major car makers, applauded Trump's action.

"Everyone agreed these EV sales mandates were never achievable and wildly unrealistic," John Bozzella, the group's president and CEO, said in a statement.

Newsom, who is considered a likely 2028 Democratic presidential candidate, and California officials contend that what the federal government is doing is illegal and said the state plans to sue.

Newsom said Trump's action was a continuation of his "all-out assault" on California.

"And this time he's destroying our clean air and America's global competitiveness in the process," Newsom said in a statement. "We are suing to stop this latest illegal action by a President who is a wholly-owned subsidiary of big polluters."

The signings come as Trump has pledged to revive American auto manufacturing and boost oil and gas drilling.

The move follows other steps the Trump administration has taken to roll back rules that aim to protect air and water and reduce emissions that cause climate change.

The Environmental Protection Agency on Wednesday proposed repealing rules that limit greenhouse gas emissions from power plants fueled by coal and natural gas.

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California, which has some of the nation's worst air pollution, has been able to seek waivers for decades from the EPA, allowing it to adopt stricter emissions standards than the federal government.

In his first term, Trump revoked California's ability to enforce its standards, but Democratic President Joe Biden reinstated it in 2022. Trump has not yet sought to revoke it again.

Republicans have long criticized those waivers and earlier this year opted to use the Congressional Review Act, a law aimed at improving congressional oversight of actions by federal agencies, to try to block the rules.

That's despite a finding from the U.S. Government Accountability Office, a nonpartisan congressional watchdog, that California's standards cannot legally be blocked using the Congressional Review Act. The Senate parliamentarian agreed with that finding.

California, which makes up roughly 11% of the U.S. car market, has significant power to sway trends in the auto industry. About a dozen states signed on to adopt California's rule phasing out the sale of new gas-powered cars.

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