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Trump proposes to roll back auto gas mileage standards

By Rachel Frazin

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The Trump administration proposed rolling back vehicle mileage standards put in place under the last administration, President Trump announced on Wednesday.

The Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards standards in question, set by the Transportation Department, set minimum miles per gallon that automakers' fleets have to meet.

“We’re officially terminating Joe Biden’s ridiculously burdensome — horrible, actually — CAFE standards that impose expensive restrictions and all sorts of problems,” Trump said at a White House event.

However, enforcement of the standards were recently gutted in the president's Big Beautiful Bill: A provision pushed by Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) reduced the penalties for not meeting the standards down to \$0, making them toothless.

Nevertheless, if the Trump proposal is finalized, the standard that automakers will be legally required to meet will be lower, even if they won't face penalties for failure to comply.

Under the Biden-era standards, the nation's vehicle fleet would have been expected to reach 50.4 miles per gallon by model year 2031. Now, the Trump administration expects the fleet to average 34.5 miles per gallon that year.

The U.S. mileage and auto pollution standards have had massive impacts on the nation's emissions trajectory, and the recent moves to gut them are considered a major setback in the fight against climate change.

They were expected to require a significant market shift toward electric vehicles.

The proposal to axe them is also a significant piece of Trump's deregulatory, affordability and jobs messages, as Trump repeatedly criticized the Biden-era standards while on the campaign trail.

“We’re bringing back the car industry that was stolen from us because we have people that didn’t know what they were doing sitting at this desk,” Trump said Wednesday, flanked by Republican lawmakers and representatives from Ford, Stellantis and GM.

In a written statement, Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said that the change would have families an average of \$1,000 on the cost of a new vehicle. The Biden administration had said that its rule for model years 2027 and beyond would save families \$600 in fuel costs over the life of their vehicles.

The Biden administration also said that its standard, which the Trump administration is proposing to dismantle, would save almost 70 billion gallons of gasoline through 2050 and prevent more than 710 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions.

The Biden administration required automakers to improve their fleets' efficiency by 8 percent for model years 2024 and 2025 and 10 percent for model year 2026. It required fleets in model years 2027 through 2031 to increase their efficiency by 2 percent each year.

Those standards were issued in conjunction with Environmental Protection Agency vehicle emissions standards that were considered particularly ambitious, but the Trump administration is also seeking to axe that regulation.

Now, the Trump administration is proposing to revert to model year 2022 standards, saying that automakers will have to increase at 0.5 percent per year from those standards through model year 2026. After that, they will have to increase 0.25 percent per year.

Trump's moves received praise from many in the auto industry.

"We're reviewing [the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's] announcement, but we're glad the agency has proposed new fuel economy standards," said John Bozzella, president and CEO at the Alliance for Automotive Innovation.

"The current CAFE rules finalized under the previous administration are extremely challenging for automakers to achieve given the current marketplace for EVs," he said.

However, environmentalists and Democrats criticized the decision.

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“Let’s call it what it is: Donald is handing his Big Oil donors exactly what they want: weaker protections for consumers and bigger profits for polluters,” said California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) in a written statement. “California will defend fuel economy standards that protect families’ budgets, our children’s lungs, and our future.”

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