

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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### Opening Statement

**Chairman Harley Rouda**

### Hearing on “The Trump Administration’s Wrong Turn on Clean Cars: How Fuel Efficiency Rollbacks Hurt California, Climate, Car Companies and Country”

**Subcommittee on Environment**

**October 29, 2019**

Good morning. My thoughts and prayers are with the people of California as they battle the destructive wildfires that have ravaged my home state. And to the first responders, who are risking their lives and giving everything they have to containing these fires, thank you from the bottom of my heart. The word “heroic” doesn’t do you justice.

I’d also like to say a few words about my friend and colleague, Chairman Elijah Cummings, whom we lost on October 17. Elijah was a pillar of moral authority in this chamber, and it was my deep honor and privilege to serve with him, to learn from him, and to be touched by his passion for and commitment to improving the lives of all Americans. That’s really what it’s all about. That’s why he served, and why I serve—to make life better for our fellow citizens; to ensure that their lives are as long, healthy, happy, prosperous and free as possible.

We have lost a giant, and this Subcommittee will honor his legacy by continuing to fight for the things he believed in. After the Chairman’s passing, Majority Leader Hoyer stopped by this hearing room and spoke to members and staff about Elijah, and he quoted from Ted Kennedy’s eulogy for his brother Robert in 1968: “My brother need not be idealized, or enlarged in death beyond what he was in life; but to be remembered simply as a good and decent man, who saw wrong and tried to right it, saw suffering and tried to heal it, saw war and tried to stop it.”

I cannot think of a better encapsulation of Elijah’s life and legacy than these words. And so, for Elijah I will echo the prayer with which Ted Kennedy ended his eulogy: “Those of us who loved him and who take him to his rest today, pray that what he was to us and what he wished for others will someday come to pass for all the world.”

Today, the Environment Subcommittee today will examine two recent decisions made by the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration under President Trump: First, the Administration has chosen to freeze fuel efficiency standards at 2020 levels, rolling back an Obama Administration policy that would slowly increase the standards to 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025—a policy, by the way, that the Obama Administration set after thorough negotiation with automakers.

These rollbacks of fuel-efficiency requirements—known as Corporate Average Fuel Economy, or CAFE, standards—are, to put it quite simply, brazen and irresponsible. The Trump Administration is gambling with people's lives here—let's make that clear from the outset.

Second, the Trump Administration is also actively preventing states from protecting their own citizens. Under the Clean Air Act of 1970, my home state of California was granted a waiver to set its own greenhouse gas emissions standards, and until this year, that waiver had never been revoked. For fifty years, previous administrations, Democratic and Republican alike, have recognized the right of California to protect the health of its own residents. California, through a meticulous and democratic process, created more stringent emissions requirements and, when the Obama Administration wanted to create a national program to limit greenhouse gases and improve fuel efficiency in vehicles, California worked with the federal government to do just that.

Currently, thirteen other states plus the District of Columbia have followed California's lead by setting more stringent emissions requirements, recognizing that the particular challenge of climate change and air pollution requires decisive action. Stricter emissions standards not only reduce the main cause of global warming, but they also encourage automakers to develop newer, more efficient vehicles that will save Americans money at the pump and improve the health of each and every American, regardless of political affiliation.

It's a win-win for everyone—except the fossil fuel companies, which unfortunately for the rest of us played a significant role in the regulatory decision-making process at EPA and NHTSA—a much bigger role than the car companies did. Perhaps that's why 17 automakers sent a letter to President Trump in June of this year asking for the Administration to work with California to develop a higher national fuel efficiency standard. Or why in July, four automakers struck their own deal with California regulators to get standards up to 51 miles per gallon by 2026.

I commend those automakers—Ford, Volkswagen, BMW and Honda—that have been courageous enough to look toward the future; that recognize that California is attempting to solve a planetary crisis while the Trump administration sticks its head in the sand; that understand that this is not just about climate change but also about Americans' right to clean air; and who have maturely and responsibly worked with California to raise mileage standards and reduce greenhouse gas emissions slowly over the course of the next several years. Unfortunately, not all auto companies have taken this tack, and I urge those companies to reconsider their decision not to comply with California's higher standards.

And I invite those companies to justify their position before my Subcommittee. Please, come explain to us why you don't believe you must play a vital role in solving the climate crisis. Explain to us why you don't care enough about the health of American citizens to bother to make better, more fuel-efficient vehicles. And above all, explain to us why you have chosen to align yourself with an administration that is stuck in the past. We want—we need—to move forward. To paraphrase Clarence Darrow: We know the future is on our side. We are pleading for the future.

Turning back the clock on progress is not leadership; it is colossal failure of leadership. Look, we can pretend climate change isn't real; we can spend days, months and years arguing over what or who is responsible, but while we're doing that, more and more carbon is entering our atmosphere and leaching into our oceans. People around the world are being displaced, public health is worsening, and natural disasters are getting more intense.

Californians know this firsthand. This past weekend, California Governor Newsom declared a statewide emergency as nearly 200,000 people fled their homes from the massive wildfires that are raging across the state. Californians are facing unprecedented fire weather conditions this season, in large part due to global warming. And, in a gruesomely circular fashion, these fires then exacerbate the impacts of climate change by releasing huge amounts of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into our atmosphere. On and on it goes.

This situation is simply not sustainable; we cannot go on like this. People's lives hang in the balance. We are lucky that there are states like California that are willing to do their jobs and enact policies designed to mitigate climate change and help the American people adapt to its effects. Those states are doing the responsible thing. They are problem-solving; they are governing. And the Trump Administration should try following their example for a change.

Thank you, and I now invite the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, James Comer, to give a five-minute opening statement.