Nearly two dozen attorneys general sue Trump administration over controversial fuel standard

The Trump administration was sued by attorneys general from 23 states and the District of Columbia over the controversial rolling back of Obama-era fuel standards. A coalition of environmental and health groups also filed suit today over the rollback. It’s the latest legal battle in President Donald Trump’s efforts to undo Obama-era plans to cut back on air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

In March, Trump finalized a rule that would require car manufacturers to make their new fleets 1.5 percent more fuel efficient each year, setting a goal of reaching an average of about 40 miles per gallon by 2026. That’s a much lower bar than what was set during the Obama administration, which would have pushed automakers to ramp up fuel efficiency by 5 percent each year in order to reach an average of 54 miles per gallon by 2025.

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The lawsuit alleges the Environmental Protection Agency and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration used a flawed analysis to justify their rollback. The agencies did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The Trump administration has argued that the Obama-era standards would have made cars more expensive, forcing people to stick with older, less-safe models. But the attorneys general point to evidence that the weaker rules could result in an estimated

thousands of premature deaths because of increased tailpipe emissions.

“What makes [Trump’s] rule so offensive is [that the Obama-era standard] is not a rule where people can say it was a disconnect. No, this was a smooth path,” Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser said on a press call. “This was a promising path. This was a future that we need. But nonetheless, we’re seeing this happening.”

The Obama-era standards had already saved vehicle owners $86 billion at the gas pump and reduced planet-heating carbon dioxide by half a billion metric tons, according to the EPA. The new standards, on the other hand, could add up to an additional 2 billion barrels of oil and nearly an additional 1 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide. That’s about as much as 257 coal-fired power plants would put out over a year.

“Just read the text of the rule and you will discover that it is a job-killer and public health hazard,” California Attorney General Xavier Becerra said in a statement. “It will increase costs to consumers and allow the emission of dangerous pollutants that directly threaten the health of our families.” The battle over cleaner cars and air is playing out as COVID-19 strikes people with respiratory diseases especially hard, the attorneys general pointed out in today’s call.

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Car companies are split over what fuel efficiency standards should be. Volkswagen, Ford, Honda, and BMW last year committed to year-over-year gains in fuel economy that exceed Trump’s weakened standards. General Motors, Toyota, and Fiat Chrysler, on the other hand, have backed Trump’s bid to revoke California’s ability to set state vehicle emissions standards higher than the federal mandate.

Ford said today that it is neither joining the suit nor defending the Trump administration’s new rule. “We have chosen

a different path in support of a voluntary framework in California," it said in a statement. "The voluntary framework gives more regulatory certainty which protects the long-term interests of the industry, affordability, consumers, and the environment."

https://www.theverge.com/2020/5/27/21272179/attorneys-general-sue-trump-administration-fuel-efficiency-standard-rollback