

With Trump gone, auto industry now backing California tailpipe emission standards

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The world's automakers say they'll cooperate with California officials and President Joe Biden on greenhouse gas emissions, ending a nasty dispute with Gov. Gavin Newsom's administration over the regulatory framework for combating climate change.

The Coalition for Sustainable Automotive Regulation, a group led by Toyota, Subaru and many other major carmakers, announced Tuesday that it's pulling out of a lawsuit pitting California against the federal government over tailpipe carbon emissions. The group called its decision "[a gesture of good faith](#)" and said it is ready to negotiate on new greenhouse gas rules.

"After four years of putting us in reverse, it is time to restart and build a sustainable future, grow domestic manufacturing, and deliver clean cars for America," Gina McCarthy, the White House's national climate advisor, said in a statement. "We need to move forward — and fast. We are looking forward to building back better and creating good-paying, union jobs right here in America that ensure our future is made in America by all of America's workers."

Newsom, on Twitter, thanked the automakers for "dropping your climate-denying, air-polluting, Trump-era lawsuit."

The carmakers' announcement comes [two months after General Motors](#) and Nissan withdrew from the lawsuit, a repudiation of then-President Donald Trump two weeks after he lost his re-election fight to Biden.

All told, the auto industry is now completely onboard with Biden and California after siding with Trump's decision to significantly weaken carbon emissions standards on motor vehicles.

WHITE HOUSE CALLS ANNOUNCEMENT 'MAJOR FIRST STEP'

Trump attacked a set of rules, developed by the Obama administration and the California Air Resources Board a decade ago, that would require automakers to reduce carbon emissions — and increase fuel mileage — by around 30% between now and 2025.

Shortly after Trump took office, his administration rolled out a far gentler rule that called for minimal changes in carbon emissions and fuel economy. Trump's administration went a step further by revoking California's unique power to set its own air-pollution standards. By doing so, Trump undermined California's "["clean car" program](#)", which forces automakers to sell hybrids and all-electric vehicles in the state in increasing numbers.

Trump's move generated multiple lawsuits and split the auto industry. Five automakers — Ford, Volkswagen, Honda, BMW and Volvo — made [a deal in 2019 with Newsom](#) and the Air Resources Board to support California and follow a slightly weakened version of the original Obama rules, giving carmakers an additional year to achieve the emissions reductions.

Other automakers, including GM and Toyota and the rest of the Coalition for Sustainable Automotive Regulation, [sided with Trump](#) in litigation that was filed over his weaker rules.

Exactly what happens next is unclear. A White House official told McClatchy that Tuesday's announcement from the automakers was "seen within the administration as a major first step."

Dan Becker, an auto industry expert at the Center for Biological Diversity, said he's heard automakers are trying to sell the Biden administration on a carbon regulation comparable to the deal Newsom's administration made with the five carmakers in 2019. Becker said the California deal is too lenient.

"It's not up to what the climate demands," Becker said. "If California is to be the basis for a future Biden standard, it needs to be far tougher than what California has already agreed to."

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