

Toyota, Fiat Chrysler drop support for Trump effort to bar California emissions rules

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(Adds California governor, environmental groups, White House reaction)

By David Shepardson

WASHINGTON, Feb 2 (Reuters) - Toyota Motor Corp, Fiat Chrysler and other major automakers said on Tuesday they were joining General Motors in abandoning support for former President Donald Trump's effort to bar California from setting its own zero emission vehicle rules.

The automakers, which also included Hyundai Motor , Kia Motors, Mitsubishi Motors, Mazda Motor and Subaru, said in a joint statement they were withdrawing from an ongoing legal challenge to California's emission-setting powers, "in a gesture of good faith and to find a constructive path forward" with President Joe Biden.

The automakers, along with the National Automobile Dealers Association, said they were aligned "with the Biden administration's goals to achieve year-over-year improvements in fuel economy standards."

Nissan Motor Co in December withdrew from the challenge after GM's decision in November shocked the industry and won praise from Biden.

On Monday, the Justice Department asked the U.S. Appeals Court for the District of Columbia to put the California emissions litigation on hold to "ensure due respect for the prerogative of the executive branch to reconsider the policy decisions of a prior administration."

Biden has directed agencies to quickly reconsider Trump's 2019 decision to revoke California's authority to set its own auto tailpipe emissions standards and require rising numbers of zero-emission vehicles, as well as Trump's national fuel economy rollback.

Asked to respond to the automakers' action, White House climate adviser Gina McCarthy said in a statement that "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."

California Governor Gavin Newsom praised the automakers on Twitter for "dropping your climate-denying, air-polluting, Trump-era lawsuit against CA" and urged them to join the voluntary framework.

TALKS WITH BIDEN

Separately, an industry trade group on Tuesday proposed to start talks with Biden on revised fuel economy standards that would be higher than Trump-era standards but lower than ones set during the prior Democratic administration.

The Trump administration in March finalized a rollback of U.S. Corporate Average Fuel Economy standards to require 1.5% annual increases in efficiency through 2026, well below the 5% yearly boosts under the Obama administration rules it discarded.

The auto group, representing GM, Toyota, Volkswagen , Honda Motor Co and others, said a new nationwide emissions framework deal "should achieve improvements in GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions roughly midway between current standards and those of the former Obama administration."

Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Transport Campaign at the Center for Biological Diversity, said Biden "must not agree to the auto companies' request to negotiate weak standards after they repudiated their agreement to abide by the Obama-Biden standards they negotiated."

Ford Motor Co, Honda, VW and BMW in July 2019 struck a voluntary agreement with California on reducing vehicle emissions that was less stringent than rules previously adopted under Obama but higher than Trump's rollback. (Reporting by David Shepardson; Editing by Kirsten Donovan and Steve Orlofsky)

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