

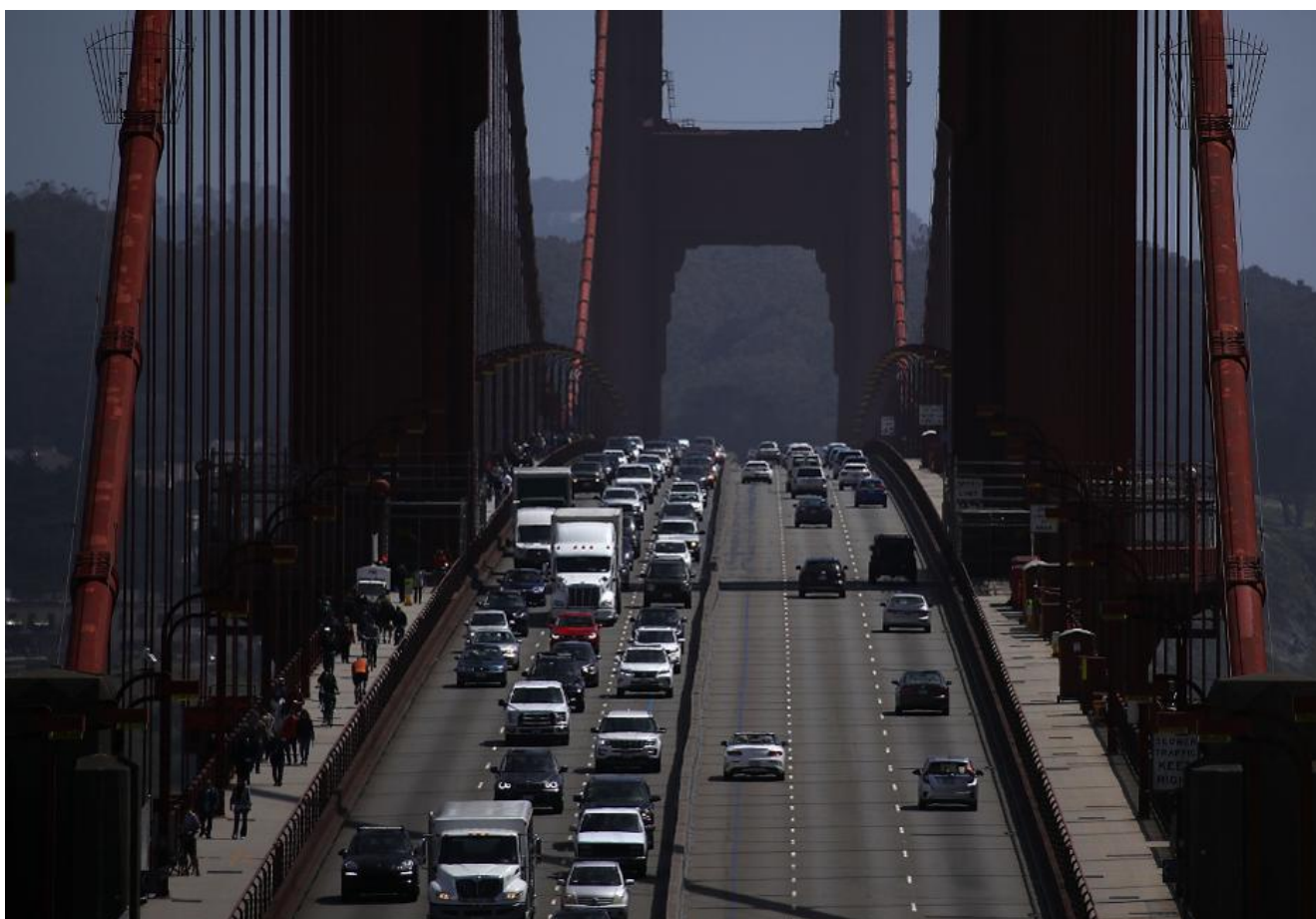
EDITORS' PICK | 828 views | Jul 25, 2019, 08:00pm

Four Automakers Join California In Leading Charge To Spurn Trump Gas Mileage Regulation



Olivia Gieger Contributor 

Leadership Strategy



California and four major automakers pledged to tighten emissions standards for their fleets, a ... [+] JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES

Four major automakers—BMW, Ford, Honda and Volkswagen—together with the State of California, set a new standard for industry emission regulations in a rebuke to Trump administration policies.

The private deal further establishes California as a leader in climate policy. Its Air Resources Board has been in secret negotiations with the four manufacturers to reach the new agreement, in which the automakers pledge to produce fleets averaging 50 miles per gallon within the next seven years. The Trump administration is engaged in rolling back Obama-era environmental regulations that would have been on par with the standards that California continues to adhere to. The new levels proposed by Trump, freezing mileage requirements at an average of 37 miles per gallon, are predicted to increase greenhouse gas emissions by 16 million to 37 million tons over the next six years, according to the NYU School of Law's State Energy & Environmental Impact Center as [reported by the *Washington Post*](#).

Canada has already followed California's lead in defying the Trump regulation, [pledging in June](#) to follow the state's auto requirements rather than the administration's. Thirteen other states have also [joined California](#) in regulating pollutants such as carbon dioxide emissions at the state level, which the current administration also plans to slash.

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"I really think of California as being a leader in managing and reducing the environmental impact of vehicles, for decades," says Dr. Roland Geyer, a professor of industrial ecology at the University of Santa Barbara's Bren School of Environmental Science and Management.

California has a "long tradition of going its own way in regulating emissions," Geyer notes, beginning in 2009 with the [Pavley Bill](#), which proposed greenhouse gas standards for vehicles—one of the first state measures to do so after a 2007 [Supreme Court decision](#) determined that states have authority to enact such standards. He also cited California's [Zero-Emission Vehicle program](#) as leading the way on vehicle emission reduction policy.

"Without that mandate, no electric vehicles would be on the road," Geyer says. The number of electric cars in use now—and how that number is predicted to explode in the coming decade—is testament to California's power in setting nationwide standards.

Since the auto industry is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States, the implication of the four automakers' announcement is profound, demonstrating that environmental leadership can emanate from industry working in tandem with individual states, rather coming from the federal government.

In a joint statement, the four automakers explained that the deal allows them to “meet both federal and state requirements with a single national fleet, avoiding a patchwork of regulations while continuing to ensure meaningful greenhouse gas emissions reductions.”

“The market is already moving in that direction,” said Julia Stein, a faculty member and supervising attorney at UCLA's Environmental Law Clinic, “but there is a regulatory push from California.” She referred to a letter written in June by 17 automakers requesting that the Trump administration not go through with proposed lower emissions standards—proof that the market is indeed shifting in this direction, despite the president's claims that his plan would help business.

Environmental groups have adopted a strategy of targeting individual states, attempting to persuade them to adopt environmentally friendly policies and regulations. Since this strategy is proving successful, with growing numbers of states adopting exactly such [policies](#), it is becoming difficult for businesses to abide by a state-by-state patchwork of regulations and leading them to push for a single, consistent national policy. The new California deal could be the harbinger of more to come, as automakers—and industries across the board—attempt to straddle the divide between individual states' efforts to reduce emissions and federal attempts to do exactly the opposite.



Olivia Gieger

I write about climate change, the environment and youth leadership issues for the Forbes Leadership section. As a rising junior at Amherst College, I spend the school year... [Read More](#)