DRIVING IN REVERSE: THE ADMINISTRATION'S ROLLBACK OF FUEL ECONOMY AND CLEAN CAR STANDARDS

THURSDAY, JUNE 20, 2019

House of Representatives

Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce and Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change

Transcript

Exchange Between Rep. Larry Buchson (R-IN-8) and Acting NHTSA Administrator Heidi King

Mr. Bucshon.

… As a Congressman in the 8th District of Indiana, this hearing is important and it directly impacts the Hoosiers across all 19 counties. In my district, the auto and auto supplier manufacturers provide 191,495 jobs and that changes, obviously, to Hoosiers, who contribute more than $15 billion to Indiana's gross domestic product each year, the second highest in the Nation.

It is imperative that the CAFE standard creates certainty and uniformity. I do, I agree with that. And while we must take steps to curb emissions, we want to make certain that standards are feasible for the industry and address technological constraints in the current market realities within the industry, which have been described by both of you.

I wanted to directly bring up some concerns, though, about some statements in the NPRM on the statement of rationale that suggested that lightweighting vehicles is unsafe. This is in contradiction to two NHTSA studies from 2012 and 2017, where researchers concluded that light-weight materials meet or exceed Federal safety performance requirements. Furthermore, the statement puts at risk many high-skilled jobs, potentially, in Indiana in my Congressional district.

I would request that you would consider removing this language from the NPRM, since it is contradicted by studies from NHTSA. Can you comment on that, Ms. King, and then Mr. Wehrum?

Ms. King. Lightweighting is very important. It is not unsafe. Lightweighting is one of the most, and I believe it is the most cost-effective way to achieve increased fuel economy. So lightweighting is not unsafe. However, the laws of physics do apply. If I have one cup here of paper and an identical cup of lead and the two met, the lead cup, physics tell us, may endure better. So weight does matter because when two objects collide on a street, the lighter weight object is likely to suffer more --

Mr. Bucshon. I would agree but if you crash a '57 Chevy into a new automobile today, which one is more likely to cause injury to the passenger?

Ms. King. The newer cars are safer than older cars and, over time, because of the innovations and engineering, the relationship between safety and lightweighting has been broken, basically. So engineering techniques, safety technology, cars have never been so safe.

Mr. Bucshon. Agreed.

Ms. King. I go back to lightweighting is not unsafe. Physics still apply but lightweighting is not unsafe.

Mr. Bucshon. Okay, Mr. Wehrum.

Mr. Wehrum. I agree with Ms. King.

Mr. Bucshon. Okay, great.

Mr. Wehrum. She is the safety expert.

Mr. Bucshon. Thank you for that. I just want to -- you know like I said, you crash a '57 Chevy into an automobile today, which has a lot of plastic, aluminum, other lightweight products in it, it is more likely, for a multitude of reasons, why the lighter vehicle actually results in more safety for the passenger than the heavier all-steel vehicle that we have had in the past.