



COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY & COMMERCE
DEMOCRATS
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Pallone Remarks at National Highway Traffic Safety Hearing

Washington, DC – *Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following opening remarks today at a Subcommittee on Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection hearing on “Oversight of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:”*

Today marks the first time someone from the Trump Administration is testifying before this Subcommittee. I thank Deputy Administrator King for being here. This is important for oversight and accountability.

It is particularly important for this authorizing committee to hear from NHTSA, the agency responsible for automobile safety. Last year, the House passed a bipartisan bill written by this Committee that would ensure that as autonomous vehicles are becoming more prevalent on our roads, proper rules are in place. Specifically, the House bill requires NHTSA to update and issue new standards to accommodate self-driving cars. Unfortunately, that bill was passed with zero input from the Administration on how or whether it could be implemented.

There are legitimate concerns that NHTSA is not prepared, and is not keeping up with the quickly changing automotive industry. It is troubling that NHTSA does not have the resources, people, or expertise it needs to fulfil its mandate. It is also concerning that the Administration clearly does not see this agency as a priority as we have yet to hear about a possible nomination for the role of NHTSA Administrator.

Investigations by this Committee have demonstrated how ill prepared NHTSA is today. During this Committee’s investigation of sudden unintended acceleration, we learned that NHTSA did not have expertise in emerging technologies, with little-to-no electrical or software engineers on staff. Then, during the ignition switch investigation, we found that NHTSA did not understand the link between the power mode status and the air bag system.

What’s more, at the same time as we are working to nudge NHTSA into the 21st century, the current Administration is doubling down on a hands-off approach. In February of last year,

the President issued an Executive Order requiring agencies to make recommendations to repeal, replace, or modify regulations. Then in March, he signaled that he was going to loosen fuel standards. Just last month, the Secretary of Transportation announced that she is working on a Federal Automated Vehicle Policy 3.0 to quote “remove regulatory barriers” for autonomous vehicles. This announcement came just four months after Secretary Chao released version 2.0, which already loosened agency guidance.

It is hard for me to understand how the Administration is moving forward with an effort to get rid of important safety and environmental standards when NHTSA has not even finalized several important standards that became law in 2012 and 2015. These include a rulemaking on rear seat belt reminders and one to improve protection of children seated in car seats during side impacts. NHTSA should prioritize completing these important rules that are critical to the safety of passengers.

Safety is also essential when it comes to autonomous vehicles. It is a great time to be in the automotive industry and to be participating in its technological evolution. The work on self-driving cars is fascinating and promising. Some vehicles on the road today can self-park and automatically brake.

While it is important that we hear from NHTSA about how it is getting the tools and skills necessary to deal with the ever-changing landscape, I want to make sure NHTSA is doing what it must to ensure safety now.

In 2016, more than 37,000 people were killed on U.S. roads. That is an increase of 5.6 percent from 2015. And 2015 saw a 7.2 percent increase over 2014 numbers. This trend is troubling.

Cars are part of our everyday lives. We depend on them to get us where we need to go. We count on NHTSA to ensure that they are safe and fuel efficient.

I am pleased that Deputy Administrator King was brought on board at NHTSA in the fall. I urge the nomination of an Administrator so that the agency has the full leadership needed to deal with the many exciting but challenging tasks ahead at NHTSA. I look forward to continuing our discussion about how NHTSA can work harder to stay with the curve, if not ahead of it.

Thank you, I yield back.

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