

Roth: Raising standards is good for America

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An overwhelming majority of consumers believe that fuel-efficiency standards for cars and trucks should be improved, according to a new poll by the Consumer Reports National Research Center.

Nearly all respondents (93 percent) support increased fuel efficiency, while 77 percent feel that car manufacturers should produce more fuel-efficient vehicles and the government should increase and enforce higher standards.

More than half (56 percent) said they were considering hybrid or electric cars for their next vehicle. Improved availability of those vehicles increases the number of consumers likely to consider them to 72 percent.

The cost of gasoline is a driving force behind the growing support. America's working families have been hit hard by seemingly ever-increasing costs for their commutes to work, while their income earnings are not keeping pace with refined gasoline costs.

Gas prices in the United States increased by more than a dime in the last month, the first increase seen since mid-October, according to the recently published Lundberg survey.

The Obama administration is attuned to consumer interest in improved vehicle fuel consumption and has proposed strengthening fuel-efficiency and carbon pollution standards for new cars and light trucks. In November, the White House announced a Corporate Average Fuel Economy target of 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025, nearly double what it is today.

The proposed standards have been endorsed by 111 members of Congress, as well as a diverse set of organizations including the United Auto Workers, auto manufacturers, national security groups, economists, business leaders, consumer groups and environmental groups.

It seems possible that a positive step can be taken toward ending America's addiction to imported oil and cutting carbon pollution. Perhaps even more important in the short term, American families need a break in their out-of-pocket expenses for getting themselves to work and their children to school.

The standards would cut our nation's gasoline use by as much as 23 billion gallons per year, which would be the largest step the U.S. has ever taken to becoming less oil-dependent, to improve national security and to tackle global warming.

By implementing these standards, the auto industry would be better positioned to compete in a global economy and could provide more efficient vehicle choices. Detroit has been its own worst enemy for decades by surrendering market share to more efficient import manufacturers. I'm hopeful that the Phoenix rising in Detroit no longer fights the idea of improving fuel economy, but instead makes it a top priority in its future designs. An efficient, affordable car is much more attractive than a shiny chrome bumper.

In 2030, new fuel standards would save Americans \$44 billion at the gas pump, reduce America's oil use by 23 billion gallons, and cut carbon pollution by an amount equal to the annual emissions from 72 coal-fired power plants.

Poll findings suggest that consumers are willing to pay more for a fuel-efficient vehicle if it means they will save money on gas over the long term.

Vehicles like the Toyota Prius, Ford Fusion Hybrid, Chevy Volt, Nissan Leaf, Honda Civic Hybrid and Hyundai Sonata Hybrid already meet the 2025 standard, which amounts to a 39-

mpg combined score in real-life driving.

Win-win in this instance seems appropriate. Everyone can benefit from adopting the proposed standards.

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