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AUTOMAKERS FILE SUIT AGAINST CLEAN CARS PROGRAM Ron Tonkin Dealerships, Mercedes-Benz of Portland, and Three State Legislators Join as Plaintiffs

The Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers filed suit Friday against two Oregon state agencies seeking to block the adoption of the Clean Cars program, a set of emissions standards aimed at making cuts in Oregon's global warming pollution.

The industry group, which is the Washington-based lobbying association for the major car companies, was joined in the suit by the Ron Tonkin car dealership chain in Portland, Mercedes-Benz of Portland and Wilsonville, Coos Bay Toyota, and Suburban Ford, Inc., as well as Senator Ted Ferrioli and Representatives Wayne Scott and Susan Morgan.

"The automakers have a thirty-year history of lying and misleading the public and policymakers in an effort to avoid even the most basic environmental protections, so unfortunately we've come to expect this kind of bullying tactic," said Jeremiah Baumann, a clean energy advocate for OSPIRG, "but it's disappointing to see elected officials and car dealers from our own communities showing this level of disregard for Oregon's environment."

Baumann noted that when Congress passed the Clean Air Act in the 1970s, Lee Iacocca, chairman of Chrysler, predicted that manufacturers would no longer be able to make cars. "It's time for the auto industry to catch up on their science lessons: the Earth is round, global warming is real, and the Clean Cars program is good for Oregon."

Governor Kulongoski has pledged to adopt the Clean Cars program in Oregon, saying "Oregon should be a national leader by combating global warming." The Clean Cars program would phase in pollution standards starting with model year 2009. Using currently-available technology, the standards would eventually cut global warming pollution by 30% from new cars and light trucks. The program would also require increased sales of advanced-technology cars and trucks, such as hybrids.

On August 29, the Governor used his line-item veto authority to strike a provision in the budget bill passed by the Legislature for the Department of Environmental Quality. That provision prohibited the agency and its citizen-oversight commission from adopting or enforcing the Clean Cars program. The auto industry suit was filed against both state government bodies, alleging that the governor's veto violates the Oregon constitution, and that the constitution only allows the Governor to use a line-item veto for budget matters. They contend that the prohibition on the Clean Cars program was a policy matter.

Supporters of the Clean Cars program point out that if the prohibition was a policy item, then it was itself unconstitutional, since the Oregon constitution forbids the inclusion of policy matters in budget bills.

"The bottom line is that with Oregon's legacy of environmental leadership, we should be moving as quickly as possible to get cleaner cars onto our roads and to start curbing global warming pollution," said Baumann.

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