

FLEET STANDARD FAIL

✖ One of the things Obama's auto task force has said it will do is hammer the Big 2.5 on their fuel efficiency. Improve efficiency, they seem to be telling Detroit, and your economic woes will disappear.

Which is why this post is so interesting (h/t Consumerist). It argues that the fleet fuel efficiency standard for Obama's auto task force members fails to meet CAFE standards—and that's with the vast majority of the car owners in the group driving foreign makes. Here's the gas mileage the task force members are getting:

- *Timothy Geithner owns a 2008 Acura TSX (23 MPG)*
- *Larry Summers owns a 1995 Mazda Protege (26 MPG)*
- *Peter Orszag owns a 2008 Honda Odyssey and a 2004 Volvo S60 (21 MPG)*
- *Lisa Jackson, EPA Administrator, owns a 2008 Toyota Prius and a Honda Odyssey minivan (33 MPG)*
- *Austan Goolsbee, chief economist for the White House Economic Recovery Advisory Board, owns a 2004 Toyota Highlander (22 MPG)*
- *Joan DeBoer, the chief of staff to LaHood, drives a 2008 Lexus RX*

350 (20 MPG)

- Heather Zichal, deputy director of the White House Office of Energy and Climate Change, owns a Volvo C30 (23 MPG)
- Gene Sperling, counsel to the Treasury Secretary, owns a 2003 Lincoln LS (21 MPG)
- Lisa Heinzerling, senior climate policy counsel to the head of the EPA, owns a 1998 Subaru Legacy Outback station wagon (24 MPG)
- Dan Utech, senior adviser to the Energy Secretary, owns a 2003 Mini Cooper S two-door hatchback (25 MPG)
- Rick Wade, a senior adviser at the Commerce Department, owns a 1998 Chevrolet Cavalier (23 MPG)
- Jared Bernstein, Vice President Joe Biden's chief economist, owns a 2005 Honda Odyssey (20 MPG)
- Ray LaHood had no vehicle information.
- Christine Romer, head of the Council of Economic Advisers, had

no vehicle information.

- *Diana Farrell, the deputy National Economic Council director, doesn't own a vehicle.*
- *Carol Browner, the White House climate czar, doesn't own an automobile.*
- *Steven Chu, Energy Secretary, doesn't own a car.*
- *Edward B. Montgomery, senior adviser to the Labor Department, owns a 1991 Harley-Davidson (45MPG)*

**281 MPG/12 People with Cars = 23.41666
MPG average**

Now, I quibble with the post's calculation: the task force should get credit for the number of hippies on the task force—Farrell, Browner, and Chu—who have no car, and if it did, the fuel efficiency for the overall transportation would be much higher than 23.4 MPG (or would have been before these folks came to DC and started getting carted around in what may well be big Chevy Suburbans) and therefore would beat CAFE standards.

Nevertheless, the post makes a very good point. I don't fault most of the individual choices of the members of this list: it may be better for Summers, Heinzerlingra, and Wade to drive relatively old cars than to incur the environmental costs of a new car (and Heinzerlingra may have an excuse for needing the less efficient all wheel drive of the Subie, though most people driving around DC don't). The

minivans—Bernstein and Orszag—are more efficient than SUVs, if you really need the space, and the Highlander is one of the most efficient SUVs this side of a Hybrid Escape. I presume the Volvo drivers are working under the out-dated assumption that they are refrigerators whose safety is so much better than other cars that it's worth the trade-off in mileage (they would have been better off to buy one of the Fords built on the same chassis, but whatever). Geithner and DeBoer have no excuse for buying such gas guzzlers so recently. And, jeebus, if you're going to buy a car as small as the Mini Cooper, it damn well better get over 30 MPG. So bounce Geithner, DeBoer, and Utech from the task force for their indefensible car choices, because they clearly don't have the judgment that will help the industry.

But still. the list does prove the point the auto manufacturerers—both domestic and (more quietly) foreign—have been making. American consumers—including at least half the members of the task force—like bigger, more powerful and heavier, arguably safer cars. And even the foreign manufacturers aren't building cars that are as efficient as industry critics say they should be. And, frankly, these are the consumers from whom manufacturers can expect to sell a car at a profit, given their higher than average disposable income (the Cavalier is probably the only car that was sold at minimal or no profit).

If these guys are actively choosing cars that bring CAFE standards down—even from foreign manufacturers—then they might want to revise their claims about what drives inefficiency in the country, because they—as consumers—sort of prove that it's not just auto manufacturer intransigence.