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VW's Nemesis and his Zero-Emission Dream

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Alberto Ayala, the deputy head of the California Air Resources Board, was the man who uncovered the VW Dieselgate scandal. He now wants to harness the fallout to quicken the transition to electric cars, no matter what Donald Trump thinks.

WHY IT MATTERS

Donald Trump's victory in the U.S. presidential race has cast uncertainty on VW's Dieselgate settlement, emissions standards and the future of electric car initiatives in the United States, but California, as the U.S.'s biggest state and largest economy, could coun-

terbalance some of Mr. Trump's policies.

FACTS

Alberto Ayala helped uncover Volkswagen's emissions cheating as the deputy executive director of the California Air Resources Board.

California has mandated that zero-emission vehicles should make up 15-percent of all new car sales by 2025.

As part of its U.S. settlement, VW has agreed to invest \$2 billion in California's electric car infrastructure and other zero-emissions projects.

Alberto Ayala didn't set out to uncover one of the biggest scandals in the history of the global automotive industry.

The deputy head of the California Air Resources Board was simply interested in gaining a better understand-

ing of German clean diesel technology.

The Golden State had adopted carbon emissions standards in 2012, and Mr. Ayala viewed light-duty clean diesel cars, a rarity in the United

States, as a possible solution to California's pollution problems.

Mr. Ayala, 48, and his colleagues at CARB, however, found eyebrow-raising irregularities in Volkswagen technology during their lab tests.

It was the start of a 15-month odyssey that would ultimately end in a shocking revelation: Germany's largest automaker had fitted cheat software to its diesel engines that artificially lowered a vehicle's emissions under test conditions and then let the vehicle produce far higher levels of greenhouse gases during normal driving.

The experience has only reinforced Mr. Ayala's fervent belief in the promise of electric cars. California has mandated that zero-emission vehicles should make up 15 percent of all new car sales by 2025.

"When we think about the consequences of the VW case, it becomes clear to us that zero-emissions vehicles are cheat proof," he told *Handelsblatt*.

For months, Mr. Ayala worked with VW's engineers, whom he trusted as colleagues, to resolve what he initially believed was a technical problem.

"They did lie through their teeth because all the way up to the last meeting we had in August, their approach to us, to me, was: 'We have a solution,'" Mr. Ayala said. "It's a betrayal."

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DEPUTY HEAD, CARB

CARB, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. diesel owners exacted a hefty price for that betrayal: Volkswagen agreed to a **\$14.7-billion (€13.6-billion) settlement** in the United States.

California leveraged the settlement to facilitate its transition to zero-emission vehicles. VW is contributing \$2 billion to expand the state's network of charging stations, among other initiatives.

"We were going to try to do everything we could with the settlement to continue to advance on our own efforts to electrify transportation," Mr. Ayala said.

VW, for its part, has announced that it will **pull out of the U.S. diesel market**. Mr. Ayala doesn't view the withdrawal as a victory. To the contrary, he has tried to limit the damage to clean diesel technology.

"I've been trying to do what I can in my role to make sure that this issue doesn't become a scarlet letter for clean diesel," he said, "because clean diesel technology is real."

While the VW diesel emissions scandal perhaps strengthens the case for electric vehicles, the election of Donald Trump as U.S. president presents new challenges for emissions regulators like Mr. Ayala.

The president-elect has called climate change a Chinese hoax, and his

nominees for the Environmental Protection Agency and the Energy Department are also climate skeptics.

Seemingly unfazed, Mr. Ayala said California will continue to push hard for zero-emissions vehicles under a Trump administration.

"For us, nothing changes," he said. "We have mandates; we have a clear direction; we have targets for greenhouse gas reductions for 2030 that we have to meet."

As the most powerful economy in the United States, California de facto sets standards for the rest of the country and could act as a check on Mr. Trump.

"We are going to continue to push as hard as we have to," Mr. Ayala said. "We are very interested in how we continue and expand the momentum we are gaining and we want to work with the auto industry and everyone else."

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