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## AUTOS

# Auto lobbying groups join forces amid DC uncertainty

**Keith Laing** The Detroit News

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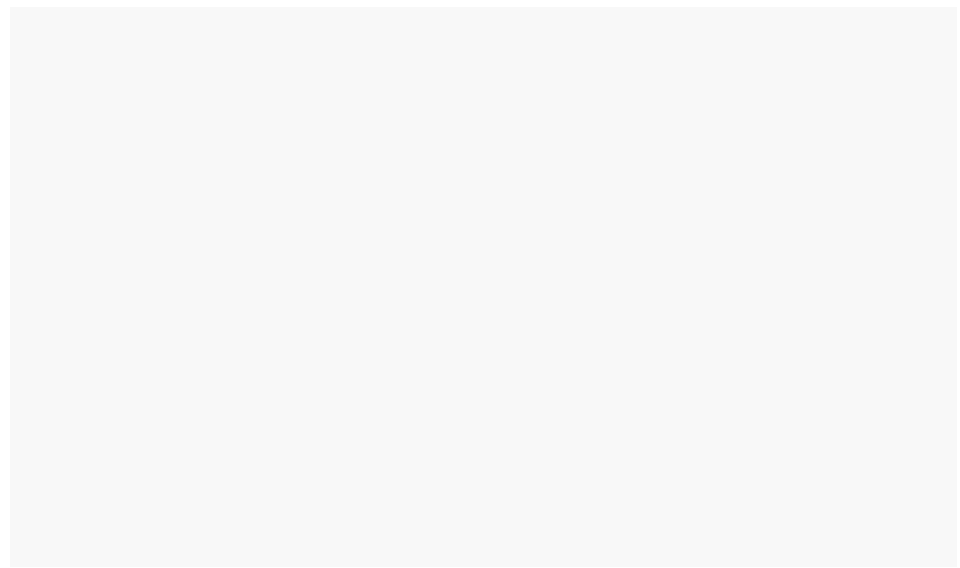


*Washington* — It can be challenging being a lobbyist in the Trump era.

Witness the merger announced Wednesday of the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, which lobbies for domestic and foreign-owned carmakers, and the Association of Global Automakers, which represents foreign-owned manufacturers.

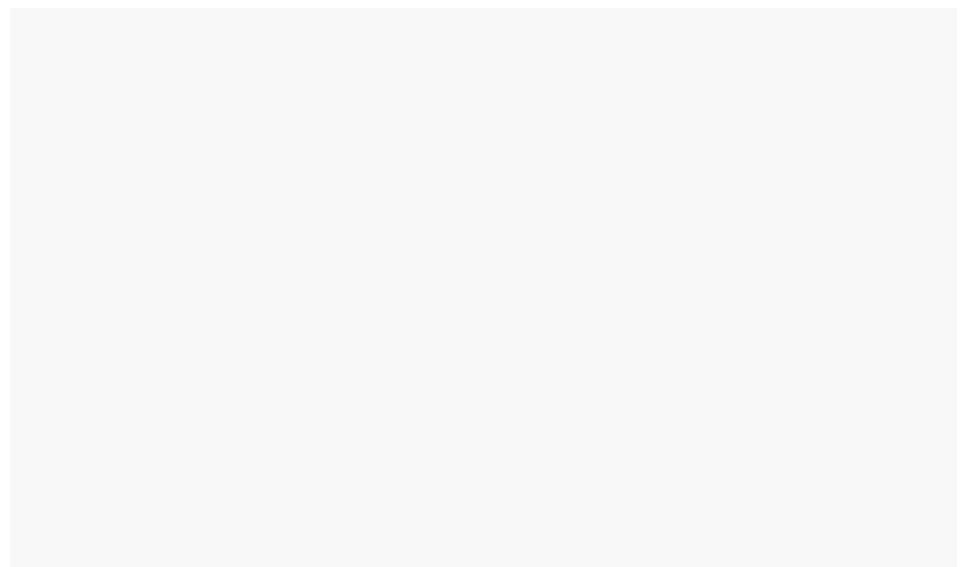
John Bozzella, center, with then-U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx, at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit in January 2016. Bozzella will lead a new auto lobbying group. *David Guralnick, David Guralnick / The Detroit News*

The new Alliance for Automotive Innovation will be led by John Bozzella, the current president of the Global Automakers group. The new group says it will represent carmakers and associated businesses that produce nearly 99% of all light-duty vehicles sold in the United States, with a focus on the mobility discussions that have animated talks about self-driving cars. The group plans to steer clear of trade issues that have dominated the Trump era, and it will also likely tread light on fuel-economy rules that have divided its membership.



The negotiation process that led to the merger was a difficult one, partly because Bozzella has played a visible role in the mpg fight with California, serving as spokesman for Ford and three other automakers who bucked the Trump administration and crafted a side deal with the Golden State.

There was concern that elevating Bozzella to the lead of the new group might put them outside Trump's good graces. And that's just one example: Add tariffs, pushback on austerity plans and Mexico production to the list of things putting automakers at odds with the administration.



Bozzella, a 26-year veteran of the auto industry who has previously worked for both Ford Motor Co. and Chrysler, said the merger of two trade associations, founded in 1965 and 1999, provides "an opportunity to develop our associations and reshape it to match the partnerships we're seeing today.

"The Alliance for Automotive Innovation will be really focused at the center of the transformation taking place today," he said. "There's so much more that unites this industry than divides it. When you get into questions like bilateral trade, there's always been in this industry different organizations with a narrower focus and those will continue to exist."

Bozzella said the merger was a product of months-long process and driven by the auto companies that form the membership list of both associations.

"This was not a decision that was taken quickly," he said. "The companies in both associations got together and thought the opportunity might be right to pursue this. ...The opportunity for us to be a single, clear, respected voice for the automobile industry is really important, and it's never been more important. We have the opportunity right now to really reshape mobility in a way that hasn't been done before."

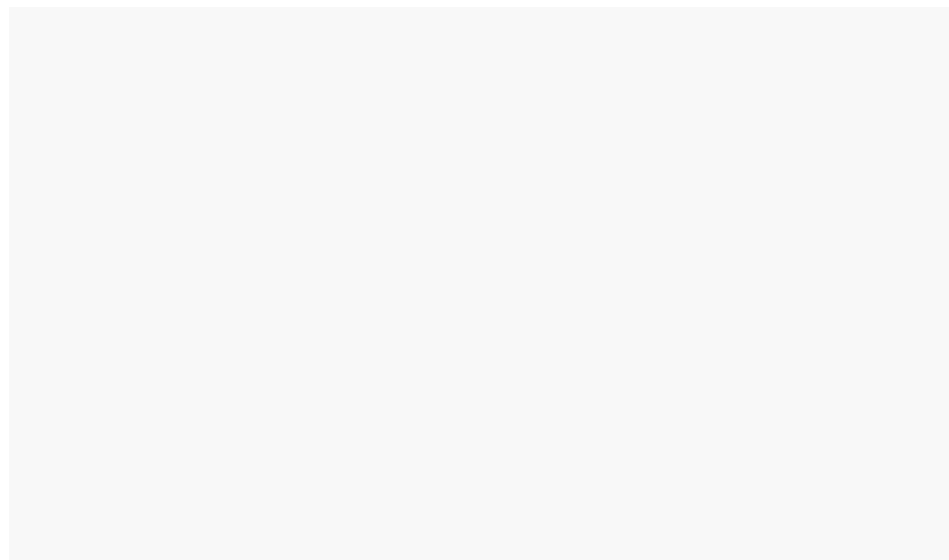
Brett Smith, director of propulsion technologies and energy infrastructure for the Center for Automotive Research, said it is a "reasonable" decision for the two lobbying groups that sometimes vie for attention in Washington to combine forces.

"They're trying to figure out to speak with one voice," he said. "This is an industry that doesn't have one voice and they're trying to figure out how that sounds."

Smith said auto lobbyists are facing a particular challenge in Trump, who appears to hold long grudges over perceived slights such as Bozzella's vocal support of the agreement between Ford and other automakers and California.

"So many of these things are various shades of gray," he said. "The industry is trying to figure out how how to have faces that isn't complete disrespect to one side or the other."

Smith said there could be advantages to the new organization's decision to steer clear of trade issues, saying "they can address of the issues that vitally important to the industry that get lost" in the trade commotion that has marked Trump's time in Washington.



"Work on the things that you think can get some consensus behind," Smith said. "This is an industry that absolutely needs to give guidance, but it also needs to get guidance on regulations. This is an effort to streamline and compartmentalize (lobbying)."

Carmakers that are members of both associations, who have themselves occasional run afoul of Trump, heralded the decision to join forces.

"As the industry is undergoing rapid transformation it is critical that we come together with a stronger voice," Mary Barra, chairman and CEO of General Motors, said in a statement. "We look forward to working together as we advocate for policies that will drive us into a new era of mobility and help us reach our vision of zero emissions, zero crashes and zero congestion."

Mitch Bainwol, chief government relations officer of Ford Motor Company and former chief of the Auto Alliance, added: "Having led the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers before joining Ford, I have a deep belief that the auto industry succeeds when we advocate together for policies that give people the ability to move freely.

"This principle has never been more important as we work to define the future of transportation," Bainwol continued. "The Alliance for Automotive Innovation will help secure America's role as a mobility leader by tackling the challenges that come with bringing new technologies to market safely and responsibly."

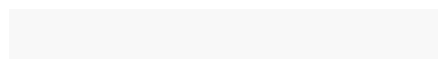
Mark Stewart, chief operating officer of Fiat Chrysler Automobiles North America, agreed, saying: "As we speak, the automotive industry and FCA are rapidly evolving toward electrified, connected and autonomous vehicles. Uniting to speak with a single voice is critical to advancing policies that encourage innovation, which provides our customers with even cleaner, safer and smarter mobility options."

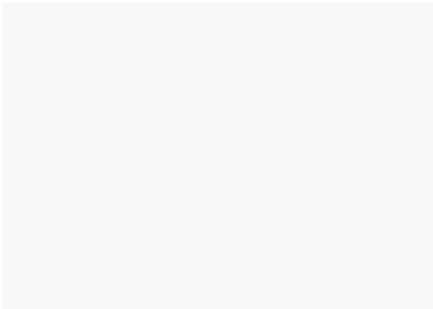
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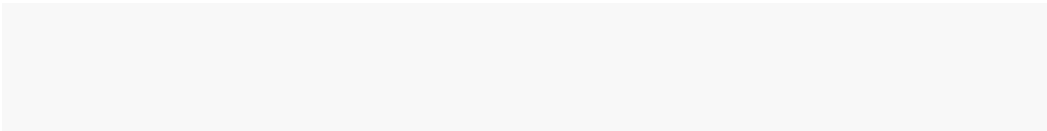
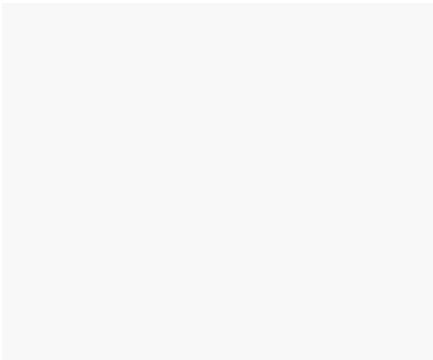
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