



Regulation-stalling agency becomes political lightning rod

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A little-known White House agency, set up during the Reagan administration, is under fire after a new report claimed it has been responsible for delaying or killing regulations that could save hundreds of lives. However, supporters say it is doing the "cold-blooded" -- but vital -- work that has to be done in scrutinizing regulations.

The Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA), set up in 1980 during President Reagan's first term, is tasked with vetting proposed regulations to be enforced by the Executive Branch, and has the power to change, delay or nix entirely any rule.

However, a Reuters investigation looked at the role played by OIRA in delaying a regulation making rearview cameras standard in all vehicles.

Legislation signed by President George W. Bush in 2008 ordered the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) to draft rules that would enhance rearview visibility in vehicles. In turn, the agency drafted an order that manufacturers install rearview cameras as standard.

The agency reportedly sent its draft to OIRA for vetting before the 2011 implementation deadline. But the proposal allegedly spent three years in no-man's land as OIRA objected, delayed and demanded the agency look for a cheaper alternative. Reuters reported that one OIRA staffer even blamed parents for these accidents, saying: "How could anybody run over their own kid?"

The delay over the cameras reportedly became such a political firestorm that President Obama was even pulled into the fray.

Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-Ill., confronted Obama about the delays in 2013 on Air Force One, telling him: “We’ve got to get this moving,” Reuters reported.

The president reportedly responded: “Believe me, I know. [Then-Transportation Secretary] Ray LaHood has made it perfectly clear to me that this was important.”

A White House official took issue with the content of the report:

“The piece in question portrays a distorted view of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs,” Emily Cain, a spokeswoman for the Office of Management and Budget, told FoxNews.com.

“Our goal is not to move rules hastily, but to maximize the effectiveness and benefit of the rules we complete. OIRA reviews hundreds of rules each year in a timely and effective manner. The fact that a small number of rules have required extended review and further work is an exception. OMB works as expeditiously as possible to review rules, but when it comes to complex rules with significant potential impact, we take the time needed to get them right,” Cain said.

According to the agency, LaHood told Congress in 2013 that one delay in the rulemaking was because his department, not OIRA, determined more research and analysis was needed — analysis that was only completed in June 2013, and which LaHood stated was still insufficient to support a final rule.

Some analysts say OIRA is doing exactly what it is supposed to.

“OIRA’s job is to be cold-blooded and calculating in a way that most people are uncomfortable,” Peter Van Doren, senior fellow at the Cato Institute and editor of the Journal “Regulation,” told FoxNews.com.

In a 2014 blog post on the subject of the cameras, Van Doren said the NHTSA concluded the cost per life saved from installation of the cameras was significantly more than the \$6.1 million value of a statistical life used by the Department of Transportation to evaluate the cost effectiveness of regulations.

“In emotional settings it’s difficult to say ‘yes, you ran over someone’ but it’s not cost effective to mandate all cars and trucks are installed with this across the U.S.,” Van Doren said.

As for the rearview camera rule, the Department of Transportation announced approval of the rule in 2014, and now all cars must have the devices in 2018.