

*This post is co-authored by Daniel Melling, communications manager at the Emmett Institute*

The New York Times [reported last week](#) that the Biden administration is preparing to restore California's waiver to set greenhouse gas auto emissions standards stricter than the federal government's rules. It's the latest episode in a regulatory saga stretching back to the George W. Bush presidency (and the subject of countless Legal Planet posts). The story also notes the administration is looking to set new emissions standards for medium and heavy-duty trucks, based on California's [first-of-its-kind rule](#) requiring diesel truck manufacturers to transition to electric trucks starting in 2024.



Mary Nichols speaks at an Emmett Institute symposium in 2018.

Photo credit: Todd Cheney

Both developments are good news for local air quality and the climate – and a reminder of California's important national role in curbing pollution from transportation, the country's [largest source](#) of greenhouse gas emissions. It's also a reminder of how excited we are at the Emmett Institute to welcome Mary Nichols as our newest faculty member. In case you missed the news, Mary [joined the Emmett Institute and UCLA Law](#) in December as distinguished counsel, where she will support our work in advancing environmental law and policy and training the next generation of leaders.

Among her many career accomplishments, Mary defended California's clean vehicle programs throughout the Trump administration and worked to expand state pollution rules for heavy-duty vehicles. These regulatory efforts underpin the forthcoming Biden administration policies reported by the Times.



Dedication of CARB's state-of-the-art Mary D. Nichols Campus in Riverside in December 2021. Photo credit: City of Riverside

The details of Mary's remarkable career are well known, but worth repeating. For decades, Mary has been one of the country's leading contributors to local, state, and federal action on air pollution, first as an attorney for the Center of Law in the Public Interest, where she was one of the first advocates to file a suit under the Clean Air Act. She later served as chair of California Air Resources Board; one of the founders of NRDC's Los Angeles office; assistant administrator for air and radiation at EPA; California secretary for the Natural Resources Agency; director of UCLA's Institute of the Environment and Sustainability; and, most recently, again as chair of CARB, where she served from 2007 until last year.

In a testament to her impact on state policymaking, CARB [dedicated its new Southern California headquarters](#) to Mary when it opened last November. The Mary D. Nichols Campus in Riverside includes state-of-the-art labs, vehicle testing facilities, and staff offices across 19 acres. (Another unique feature is the multiple public artworks with climate change themes, including a limestone sculpture of a fossilized gas station that the [Los](#)

[Angeles Times called](#) “the perfect symbol for California’s climate fight.”)

We are thrilled that Mary has chosen UCLA Law as part of the next chapter in her career, and especially for the ways our students will benefit from her mentorship as they launch leadership careers in environmental law and policy. Mary has already inspired and supported countless other attorneys within the Emmett Institute and UCLA Law networks – including two leaders with key roles in these state and federal actions: Liane Randolph, a 1993 graduate of UCLA Law, who was [appointed chair of CARB](#) in December; and our founding faculty co-director Ann Carlson, who is now [on leave as chief counsel at NHTSA](#) where she is helping to shape federal rules for vehicles.

If the last few years are any indication, the transition to clean cars and trucks will have no shortage of thorny problems for the environmental law and policy community to grapple with as new rules come into effect. We look forward to sharing more news on our work in this area in the months ahead.