

# Congress Pushing To Restore Hydrogen Funding

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WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. Congress is moving to restore funding for hydrogen research prized by the auto industry despite questions from the Obama administration over the time it will take to build a fleet of vehicles and a network of fueling stations.

The Senate was poised to provide \$190 million to fund hydrogen research programs as part of a budget plan under consideration Wednesday, more than double the amount sought by the Obama administration. Amid concerns about the nation's reliance on imported oil, lawmakers said it would be shortsighted to cut funding for the zero-emission vehicle technology while Germany and Japan intensified efforts to build a hydrogen network.

"To retreat from research and development now would be a major mistake," said Sen. Byron Dorgan, a Democrat.

President George W. Bush generated interest in hydrogen in 2003 when he launched a \$1.2 billion research program for hydrogen vehicles. General Motors, Toyota, Daimler, Honda have aggressively pursued the vehicle technology, outlining plans to put hydrogen fuel cells on the roads in the next decade.

General Motors Co. has tested a fleet of hydrogen fuel cell electric Chevy Equinox while Toyota Motor Corp. introduced a car powered by hydrogen and electricity last year and will introduce an improved hydrogen fuel cell vehicle in 2015. Daimler AG has spent nearly \$2 billion and plans to spend another \$700 million by 2011 for the commercial production of fuel cell vehicles while Honda has leased a small number of FCX Clarity vehicles in Southern California to assess hydrogen's future.

General Motors spokesman Greg Martin said "without the right level of funding toward applied research, the pace of development we've seen over the last few years could be slowed to a crawl."

Numerous obstacles remain for hydrogen. Auto companies do not disclose costs, but the vehicles can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars because most are hand-built prototypes and the nation lacks a network of fueling stations. Engineers are trying to expand the distance the cars can drive on a tank of fuel and improve other components of the vehicle.

The Obama administration has been skeptical, showing more interest in electric plug-in cars and other short-term improvements to internal combustion engines. When the administration released its budget plan earlier this year, the hydrogen research program was slashed from \$169 million this year to \$68 million in 2010.

Energy Secretary Stephen Chu told lawmakers in May that research into electric

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cars, batteries for plug-in cars and the development of biofuels was "a much better place to put our money." Chu said in a statement Wednesday that he was "encouraged by the fact that Congress is showing continued support for clean energy in the 2010 budget."

Many lawmakers have resisted the cuts to research projects to universities and labs in their home states. The House approved about \$153 million for hydrogen in a spending bill earlier this month and congressional negotiators are expected to merge the bills in the fall.

Automakers said the U.S. research was important because other countries are stepping up their interest in hydrogen. In Germany, the government has outlined plans to build 150 stations by 2013 and up to 1,000 stations by 2017.

There are 63 operational hydrogen fueling stations in the United States, according to the National Hydrogen Association, and nearly half are located in California.

"We aim to provide affordable and reliable passenger and mass transit vehicles with fuel cells but in order for people to buy them, it is important to have the infrastructure to refuel them," said Daimler spokesman Han Tjan.

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