

The American Automobile: Target of Climatism

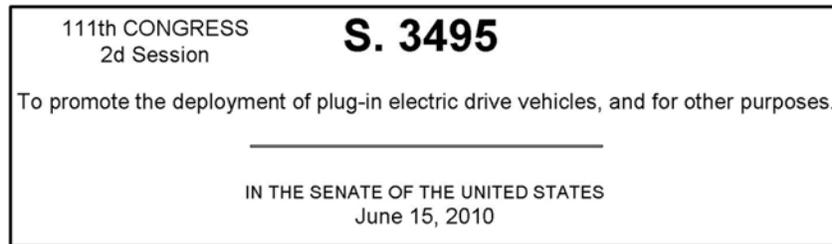
By Steve Goreham

Environmental groups have launched a new effort, the [Safe Climate Campaign](#), to radically transform the American automobile and fight climate change. Nathan Wilcox, global warming director at Environment America, states: “Americans want cars that go farther on a gallon of gas. They want our country to use less oil. They want our politicians doing more to address the problem of global warming, not less.” But the proposals are so extreme that the mini-van so loved by Soccer Moms may become an endangered species.

To kick off the campaign, nineteen environmental organizations, including Greenpeace, the National Wildlife Federation, the Sierra Club, and the Union of Concerned Scientists, [sent a letter](#) on September 9 to President Obama calling for a Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standard of 60 miles-per-gallon (mpg). The memo also advocates a global warming tailpipe pollution standard of 143 grams-per-mile, both to be implemented by model year 2025. The memo states: “Setting strong global warming pollution and fuel efficiency standards for new cars and trucks is a key opportunity to put America on the right path.”

If adopted, these proposals will require that the average vehicle sold meet

the standards or manufacturers pay a per-vehicle fine. Consumers will be forced to buy small high-mileage cars, primarily electric and hybrid, and forgo large vehicles based on the internal combustion engine, such as today's mini-vans. Such emissions standards could significantly raise the price of our cars. Europe recently enacted similar emissions standards that are [projected to boost prices](#) by more than \$8,000 per vehicle.



Congress is now an advocate of electric cars. The Promoting Electric Vehicles Act of 2010 ([S. 3495](#)), was introduced in the Senate in June. If passed, the act will direct state regulatory agencies and electric utilities to plan for electric vehicles and to deploy electric vehicle charging stations. The bill includes a “Targeted Plug-in Electric Drive Vehicle Deployment Communities Program,” authorizing the Secretary of Energy to grant \$500 million in taxpayer money to each of up to 15 cities to “fund projects in the deployment community.” The goal is to achieve deployment of 700,000 plug-in vehicles at an estimated cost of \$4 billion. A large share of these funds will be funneled to General Motors, majority-owned by the U.S. government. These subsidies will add to the \$2.7 billion in [electric car grants](#) already provided by the 2009 Recovery Act.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is aggressively moving to regulate greenhouse gas emissions. On [April 1](#), the EPA established a new 35.5 mpg CAFE standard and a vehicle emissions standard of 250 grams per mile, effective for automobile model year 2016. The EPA has also [proposed](#) new “window stickers” with an “A+” through “D” grade based on fuel economy and emissions. Consumers may soon be told that plug-in electric vehicles rate an “A,” while SUVs get a “B” or lower. In the eyes of the EPA and climate alarmists, safety, roominess, driving range, acceleration, carrying capacity, and price/performance rate a lower grade than solving the climate crisis.

The danger is not that the government provides incentives to develop an electric vehicle industry, but that these policies become a coercive effort to force consumer purchases. Hybrid vehicles now account for only about 3% of U.S. annual [vehicle sales](#) and plug-in electric car sales are negligible. According to a 2010 National Academy of Sciences [report](#), a plug-in hybrid electric vehicle (PHEV) with a 40-mile battery range will cost \$14,000-18,000 more than a conventional car. Even with battery improvements, the PHEV will still cost \$10,000 more by 2030. As an example, the recently announced sub-compact Chevrolet Volt has a 40-mile battery range and is [priced](#) at an expensive \$41,000. Charging times are eight hours from a 120-volt electrical outlet, or a still-inconvenient three hours if a buyer purchases a 240-volt [charging](#) station for \$2,000-\$5,000. Coercive standards proposed by the Safe Climate Campaign will impose life-style changes and high costs on American citizens.

During the June Senate [hearings](#) on S.3495, “energy independence” or “reducing our dependence on foreign oil” were the often-stated reasons why we must adopt electric cars. Vehicles account for more than 70% of the seven billion barrels of annual U.S. oil [consumption](#), 57% of which was imported in 2008. Advocates urge adoption of electric cars to reduce imports from nations such as Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Venezuela.

But we have a more practical solution available than forcing electric cars on Americans. By expanding imports from friendly nations, such as Canada (currently our largest oil partner), Mexico, and Brazil, and boosting domestic oil production, we can reduce our dependency on rogue nations. The U.S. Geological Survey [estimates](#) 10.4 billion barrels of oil are available from our Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), enough to replace imports from Saudi Arabia for 20 years. The continental U.S. also has 163 billion barrels of [unproven reserves](#), but 85% of this total is currently in areas where exploration and drilling are banned. Yes, the recent BP oil blowout in the Gulf of Mexico was a tragedy. But the BP oil blowout in 2010, the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989, and the Santa Barbara blow-out in 1969 add up to only three major spills in the last 50 years. Improved safeguards should be able to lower the chance of such spills.

The letter to President Obama closes with the phrase: “With these standards you can ensure we take this opportunity on the path to ending

our dependence on oil.” Note that it says “dependence on oil,” not “foreign oil.” A visit to the websites of environmental groups finds opposition to *any* efforts to grow U.S. oil production. They favor a ban on offshore drilling, and oppose drilling in ANWR, expansion of drilling in the continental United States, imports from Canadian oil sands, and construction of new oil pipelines and refineries. Indeed, these organizations also oppose the use of coal- and gas-fired electrical power plants. Energy independence is the often-stated reason for the electric car push, but the real reason is that our gasoline-burning cars are blamed for global warming.

Climatism, the belief that man-made greenhouse gases are destroying Earth’s climate, is the ideology behind the attack on our cars. Earth’s surface temperature has warmed only about one degree in the last 100 years, but climate alarmists tell us that this warming is “unprecedented.” They demand that we switch to fluorescent lights, wind- and solar-generated electricity, vegetarian diets, and now electric cars.

Yet, geologists tell us that Chicago and New York City were covered by an ice sheet only 15,000 years ago. The Earth’s surface temperature warmed 10 to 20 degrees as the ice melted, providing the warm interglacial period we now enjoy. None of the post-ice age warm-up was due to emissions from SUVs, but alarmists are certain that the much smaller warming of the last 30 years is man-made. As a result, the American automobile is the target of Climatism.

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