



Climate Change Can't Excuse Electric Car Subsidies

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The New York Times reports the auto industry “will be hard pressed to meet its [federal government] target of 54.5 miles per gallon in 2025,” despite spending billions on fuel-saving technologies. Average mileage for vehicles sold this year is about 25 mpg, the article notes, and “the lowest-emission models are among the least popular.”

The excuse for this quixotic crusade to shove us into tiny cars designed in Washington (preferably electric) is that U.S. cars and SUVs are widely believed to be a huge source of global greenhouse emissions. “Our personal vehicles are a major cause of global warming,” claims The Union of Concerned Scientists. But such claims aren't based on science or even basic math.

In reality, all U.S. passenger vehicles account for barely 3 percent of global greenhouse emissions. Let's walk through the numbers.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that Transportation accounted for 31.2 percent of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions in 2014. That's the figure the Union of Concerned Scientists cite in their effort to blame “personal vehicles.” The fallacy is that 40 percent of transportation's greenhouse gases come from heavy trucks, trains, airplanes, buses, boats, and pipelines – *not* personal vehicles.

According to the Energy Department's Transportation Data Energy Book, cars, light trucks and motorcycles accounted for just 60 percent of the greenhouses gases from transportation. In other words, our personal vehicles accounted for only 60 percent of the 31.2 percent attributed to transportation, or *just 18.7 percent* of all U.S. greenhouse gas emissions.

But global warming refers to the *whole world*, not just the U.S. The U.S accounts for 16 percent of worldwide greenhouse gases, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Do the math: Personal vehicles account for 18.7 percent of U.S. greenhouse gases but U.S. greenhouse gases are 16 percent of the world total. That means U.S. motorists account for less than 3 percent of the *global* total (16 of 18.7 percent).

In his 2011 State of the Union address, President Obama pledged to have a million electric cars on the road by 2015 to save oil and to “save our planet.” So, the government began to dole out \$7,500 tax credits to affluent buyers of pricey electric vehicles. And the president’s increasingly quixotic fuel economy mandates can be avoided when major automakers buy “emission credits” – providing tens of millions in loot for manufacturers of electric vehicles (EVs) such as Tesla and Nissan.

There were 236 million cars and light trucks on the road in 2013, so even if a million heavily-subsidized EVs had actually been sold by now, it would still have amounted to a trivial 4 percent change in the fleet. It would take a truly gigantic change in the types of cars and trucks we drive to even trim U.S. motorists’ share of global greenhouse emissions from 3 to 2.5 percent, and such a heroic and costly gesture would be promptly nullified by the proliferation of coal-fired power plants in China and Japan.

Out of 17.5 million passenger vehicles sold in 2015, only 116,000 were electric vehicles (EVs). Even if such “zero emission” electric cars were not typically plugged into power plants that burn coal and natural gas, their trivial share of U.S. vehicles on the road couldn’t possibly make a discernable difference to the 3 percent of global greenhouse gas due to U.S. passenger cars.

The real reason for all the scandalous regulations and subsidies designed to shove us into underpowered mini-cars has nothing to do with “saving the planet.” It’s all about doling out lucrative gifts (emissions credits, grants and subsidies) to politically-favored companies who try to sell us unwanted electric cars or biofuels while the government punishes taxpayers and companies that produce vehicles American consumers really want.

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