



Republicans hammer Biden on energy as president touts electric vehicles

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President Joe Biden is promoting America's green energy future while visiting a General Motors electric vehicle plant in Detroit, but Republicans argue he should be a lot more focused on the problems of the present.

Biden aims to have half of all new vehicles in the United States running on electricity by 2030, and GM has said it will go all-electric by 2035. Meanwhile, the average gallon of gas costs nearly \$3.40 this week, according to the Energy Information Administration, a year-over-year rise of 50%.

"American families are staring down the barrel of skyrocketing heating bills, and the Democrats' response is to go to war against affordable American energy," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said on the chamber floor Tuesday. "The Biden administration doesn't have any strategic plan to snap its fingers and turn our massive country into some green utopia overnight. They just want to throw boatloads of government money at things like solar panels and electric vehicles and hope it all works out."

McConnell was one of 19 Republican senators who voted for the \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill that Biden is on tour selling to the public. But the GOP leader is now concerned with the \$1.85 trillion social welfare and climate-focused spending bill that Democrats hope to pass in the House this week.

The contrast between far-off energy goals and the pain people feel at the pump is a major point of contention between the two parties, and Biden seems to have taken notice.

Despite saying in October that "I don't see anything that's going to happen in the meantime" that would reduce prices before 2022, the president issued a letter to the Federal Trade Commission this week asking it to investigate oil and gas companies over price hikes. The letter, however, is unlikely to make an immediate difference.

The White House's "Build Back Better" legislation includes new government programs and subsidies designed to end fossil fuel use, reduce carbon emissions, and increase mass transit.

"We have a responsibility to future generations," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said from the Capitol steps while standing alongside climate activists. The already-approved infrastructure bill includes \$7.5 billion for electric vehicle charging stations, but it leaves out much of the anti-fossil fuel policies many House Democrats hope for.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer warned the effects of climate change will be "worse than COVID" every year unless Congress acts. But private investment in renewable energy is already surging, and if the government pushes too hard, it could lead to price surges lasting several years, argues the Cato Institute's Scott Lincicome.

"It should be market-based," said Lincicome, a senior fellow in economics at the libertarian-leaning think tank. "The government shouldn't be trying to discourage fossil fuel production while putting its thumb on the scale for renewable technology that looks promising but might not be."

Republicans in Congress take it a step further, arguing big government initiatives will hurt people not only now, but far into the future. More than two-thirds of the electricity in McConnell's home state of Kentucky comes from coal, so aggressive action will hit his state especially hard.

A group of House Republicans slammed Biden last month in a letter for backing what they called anti-American energy policies, including a White House request for OPEC+ nations to increase production. The letter, which was signed by more than 100 GOP lawmakers, including House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, said the move risks empowering the country's enemies, such as Russia and Iran.

Republicans also decry moves that could hit domestic oil production, such as reports that the Biden administration may close the Line 5 pipeline that provides much of Detroit's oil.

Both parties say their argument will help the U.S. compete with China. In a *Detroit Free Press* column, White House officials Brian Deese and Jake Sullivan wrote that China controls 80% of global battery manufacturing and that the spending bill will jump-start U.S. efforts to catch up.

McConnell argues China's dominance means that investing in electric vehicles translates to investing in China, labeling the framework "Build Back Beijing."

With winter approaching and high heating bills lurking as the next inflation threat, political battles over America's energy future will only intensify in the coming months. If polls are to be believed, Republicans may have the advantage with the public. A recent *Washington Post*-ABC News poll found that about half of respondents blame the White House for rising inflation, while Gallup's October 2021 survey found only 3% of voters consider climate change to be the nation's most important problem.

"To the extent that America still remains reliant on fossil fuels, decreased investment now could mean big problems in a few years," said Lincicome. "There is a gamble there."