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House panel seeks answers on Obama's electric vehicle strategy

BY DAVID SHEPARDSON DETROIT NEWS WASHINGTON BUREAU 2 COMMENTS

Washington -A House panel investigating the Obama administration's support for electric vehicles wants to know if the administration still thinks the U.S. will have 1 million plug-ins on the roads by 2015.

In a letter to Energy Secretary Steven Chu, Rep. Andy Harris, R-Md., who chairs the House Science Committee's panel on energy and environment, wants information about the Obama administration's proposal to boost electric vehicle spending by more than \$1 billion through a National Community Deployment Challenge.

The letter criticized the Obama administration's proposal to boost the electric vehicle tax credit to \$10,000 — up from \$7,500 — noting that General Motors Co. has said the average income of a Chevrolet Volt owner is \$170,000.

"Weak demand and reliability problems have plagued their introduction," Harris said, noting that GM has suspended production of the Volt for five weeks and that the Fisker Karma purchased by Consumer Reports was deemed undriveable after a few days.

The Energy Department didn't respond to Harris' criticism directly.

"As part of President Obama's sustained and comprehensive approach to lowering energy costs for American consumers, the Obama Administration is pursuing an all-of-the-above energy strategy," said Energy Department spokeswoman Jen Stutsman. "This includes expanding domestic oil and gas production, improving the fuel efficiency of our vehicles, developing next generation biofuels, and investing in cutting-edge electric vehicle technologies that will insulate American drivers from high prices at the pump over the long-term.

The letter also notes that Ecotality, the recipient of a \$114.8 million Energy Department grant, is being investigated by the Securities and Exchange Commission for insider trading. The letter said that Ecotality had installed just half the charging stations it was supposed to.

Then-candidate Obama in 2008 pledged in a campaign document to "get 1 million plug-in hybrid [cars](#) on the road by 2015."

Harris wants to know "what is the status of and outlook for President Obama's goal of putting 1 million EVs on the road by 2015." He also asks when EVs will be cost-competitive without government subsidies, and how many government-paid charging stations have been installed. He also asks how much the Obama administration has spent on electric vehicle tax credits.

The letter says the Obama administration has committed more than \$13 billion in federal loans and grants to boost electric vehicles, and "has generated great concern regarding the potential for waste, duplication and cronyism and the potential of picking 'winners and losers' among [competing](#) companies and technologies."

President George W. Bush first signed into law the \$7,500 tax credit for electric vehicles in 2008.

This month, the White House said it wants to spend \$1 billion to help up to 15 communities speed the deployment of advanced-technology vehicles. Another \$3.7 billion would go to new tax credits for electric vehicles, [commercial trucks](#) and other advanced-technology vehicles.

But in a major policy shift, Obama wants to broaden a government tax credit that was created to support electric vehicles. He now wants to include other types of advanced vehicles, including those that run on fossil fuels such as

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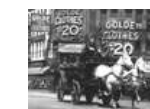


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