

PRO/CON: Should the government pay people to buy electric cars?

By McClatchy-Tribune, adapted by Newsela staff on 01.09.14

Word Count **1,411**



Angie Vorhies plugs in the charging cord to her Nissan Leaf electric vehicle at a mall on Nov. 13, 2013, in San Diego. AP Photo/Lenny Ignelzi

PRO: Electric cars good for the environment

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. — Electric cars are selling fast in the United States, but the government still has to give car makers money to help them out. People who buy electric cars get money from the government as well.

It would be a bad idea to “pull the plug” on money to help electric cars.

If the government stopped helping, car companies would lose money when they sell electric cars. The government made rules so that cars would go further using less fuel. But making new cars costs car makers money, so the government gives car companies money to make the rules easier to handle.

The rules are a challenge to automakers. Between now and 2025, cars must go longer distances on a gallon of gas. New cars and trucks average less than 30 miles per gallon (mpg) right now. They must increase that to more than 50 mpg.

Helping The Environment

And more cars that don't burn gas must be sold. In California and nine other states, one out of every seven new cars will have to be electric. Right now they are just a tiny amount of the cars for sale in those states.

These rules were made for excellent reasons. The U.S. buys oil from other countries. But things sometimes go bad in those parts of the world, and it could be hard to get oil. If the U.S. buys less oil from other countries, businesses here won't have to worry as much about a steady oil supply.

The rules are also meant to help the environment. Burning gas might make the earth hotter. That can possibly [change the climate \(https://www.newsela.com/?tag=global+warming\)](https://www.newsela.com/?tag=global+warming).

The rules may be too demanding. But, the government doesn't plan to look at them again until 2017.

It takes a long time to launch new types of cars. So, this is the wrong time to change anything. But, the desire to do so makes sense.

President Obama wanted there to be one million plug-in cars on the road by 2015. That goal was too hopeful. It won't happen in time.

However, sales of plug-in cars are growing quickly. Even faster than traditional hybrids, which run on gas and batteries. Sales are growing faster than the Toyota Prius did at first. It was the first hybrid.

Second Generation Coming

We should learn from the city of Oslo in Norway. In that European city, many people choose plug-in cars over cars that use gas.

It is true that plug-in cars aren't for most Americans. They're too expensive. They don't go very far before they have to be plugged in and charged. The Chevrolet Volt, the Nissan Leaf and the Tesla are some of the most popular plug-in cars.

But, car makers have learned a lot during the four years that plug-ins have been around. The second generation of plug-in cars is about to come out. Every automaker will be offering a plug-in car.

Car companies are trying to beat each other to get customers. New plug-in vehicles should be able to go farther before they need to be recharged. They should also be cheaper than the older ones.

The money from the government is important. It will let us see if this new technology will work. Electric cars could be a breakthrough. They could help U.S. business.

Someday, electric vehicles must be sold without help from the government. People should even pay a little extra for electric cars to keep roads in good shape. Owners of gasoline-powered cars already pay extra to the government when they buy gas.

But the government should keep supporting electric cars until 2017. Then it can decide if it wants to stop helping them.

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CON: Not good for families or the environment

WASHINGTON — Spending government money to put more electric cars on the road is a mistake.

The government can't fix our energy problems. But that's not stopping it from trying. The government gives money to people who buy electric cars. The idea is to give people a nudge when they are shopping for a car.

But electric cars aren't for everyone.

People who drive electric cars do not have children. Or, they don't plan to have any.

Too Expensive For Families

Electric cars aren't good for families. They're too expensive. They're too small. And, they don't go far enough before they need to be recharged. When the battery dies it has to be plugged in to charge.

Having children is very expensive. The average cost of raising a child for the first 18 years is over \$240,000. Then, add the cost of college and each child can be more than \$340,000.

But, people who make lots of money have fewer children than poor people.

And rich people are the ones who can afford expensive electric cars, so they don't even need the help from the government to buy a car.

An independent government agency compared the lifetime cost of different types of cars. Electric cars and plug-in hybrid cars cost \$12,000 more to own than a gas car or regular hybrid, which doesn't get plugged in. Hybrid cars run on gas and electric batteries. Some can be plugged in to charge, like an electric car. Other hybrid cars can't be plugged in. Their batteries get charged when the car's wheels move.

The government awards people \$7,500 for buying an electric car. But, even that amount doesn't make up for how much more they cost to own. The amount the government awards would need to be \$4,500 more to make up the difference.

But no amount of government action can fix other problems.

—These cars are too small. Space is lost because the battery takes up a lot of room. They're also made smaller so that they weigh less. Lighter cars can travel for longer before they need to be recharged.

—Most all-electric cars can't go more than 100 miles on a charge.

—Charges can take hours and leave people dependent on the power grid. That could make charging a problem since the grid is getting less and less reliable.

Electric-gas hybrid cars run on gas and electric batteries. They are a better alternative to all-electric cars, but they are still small and expensive.

Doesn't Help The Environment

Electric cars need to be recharged often. That's not good for families. Electric cars are best for drivers who use them the same way every day. Otherwise they could run out of power at bad times.

But kids can be all over the place. They may have band, soccer, football, and dance practices that change a lot. They sometimes get sick and need to be taken home. They even have to stay late at school sometimes.

The government is spending \$7.5 billion over 10 years on electric cars. But, it won't result in much. It will just support cars that only a few people will buy.

J.D. Power surveys people about the things they own. It says that electric car owners see helping the environment and nature as the "most important benefit" of such cars. But even here, electric vehicles fail.

A report found that building electric vehicles produces a lot of harmful gasses. It release double the amount of bad gasses into the air as building traditional automobiles. These gasses are believed to cause climate change which can hurt the environment and nature.

And, electric vehicles have batteries. But those batteries are charged with electricity from burning oil and other fuels. And their batteries contain toxic chemicals.

The first electric car was made 116 years ago.

Electric cars haven't gotten very far since then. It's time to pull the plug on government subsidies.

ABOUT THE WRITER David A. Ridenour is president of the National Center for Public Policy Research, a conservative think-tank. This essay is available to McClatchy-Tribune News Service subscribers. McClatchy-Tribune did not subsidize the writing of this column; the opinions are those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the views of McClatchy-Tribune or Newsela. This op-ed was adapted by Newsela.