

Chuck Schumer: A Bold Plan for Clean Cars

I have a proposal that is supported not just by environmentalists but also by labor and large automakers.

By Chuck Schumer

Mr. Schumer is a United States senator from New York.

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Scientists tell us that to avoid the most devastating effects of climate change, the world needs to be carbon neutral — to have net-zero carbon dioxide emissions — by midcentury. At the moment, we are not remotely on track to meet that target. We need to act urgently and ambitiously, which will require building diverse coalitions of political support.

That's why I am announcing a new proposal designed to rapidly phase out gas-powered vehicles and replace them with zero-emission, or "clean," vehicles like electric cars. The goal of the plan, which also aims to spur a transformation in American manufacturing, is that by 2040 *all* vehicles on the road should be clean.

What distinguishes this proposal is not only its scale but also its ability to unite the American environmental movement, the American labor movement and large automakers. It has already earned the support of climate groups like the Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council and the League of Conservation Voters; labor unions like the United Automobile Workers and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers; and car manufacturers like Ford and General Motors.

How would the plan work? First, it would give you a large discount on an American-made electric vehicle when you trade in a gas-powered car. Lower-income Americans could get an even bigger discount on a new vehicle or a discount on a used electric vehicle. In total, these discounts should result in 63 million fewer gas-powered cars on the road by 2030 and put America on a path to having 100 percent of new car sales be clean.

Second, the plan would make electric vehicles — and the necessary battery-charging infrastructure — accessible to all Americans, regardless of where they live and work. This would be accomplished by providing grants to states and cities to build charging stations,

with a particular emphasis on low-income, rural and other underserved communities.

Third, the plan aims to establish the United States as the global leader in electric vehicle and battery manufacturing by providing grants to retool existing manufacturing plants in the United States and build new ones in this country that specialize in those technologies.

Accomplishing all of this would require an estimated investment of \$454 billion over 10 years.

You might object: Isn't the transition to electric vehicles already happening? Yes, but it is progressing too slowly. Transportation still accounts for nearly one-third of America's carbon output. Even though many American automakers are preparing for an all-electric future, electric vehicles are still too expensive for too many Americans, and our country lacks sufficient battery-charging infrastructure.

Critics have long said that bold action on climate change would cost America money and jobs. This is not true. My plan is estimated to create tens of thousands of new, good-paying jobs in this country and should re-establish the United States as the world leader in auto manufacturing. Much as America experienced a revolution in auto manufacturing at the outset of the 20th century, America under this plan should experience a revolution in clean auto manufacturing at the beginning of this century.

But we have to move fast. China now accounts for more than half of the world's electric vehicle market; it overtook the United States as the world leader in 2015. If we don't match the level of China's commitment, we will miss an enormous opportunity.

I have promised that if Democrats win control of the Senate in November 2020, I, as majority leader, will introduce bold and far-reaching climate legislation. This proposal for clean cars would be a key element of that bill.

Achieving progress in Washington on any major issue requires a broad coalition to break through the partisan gridlock. The support that this clean car proposal has already garnered from the environmental movement, the labor movement and automakers means not only that it is more likely to win support from the public but also that it is more likely to become law. Having a clearly popular and beneficial proposal like this one as a key element of a larger climate plan will give Democrats a strong hand to play.

This proposal is about American jobs, American global economic leadership and protecting the planet. Nothing could be more worthy of pursuit.

Chuck Schumer (@SenSchumer) is a senator from New York and the Democratic leader in the Senate.

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