



# House Democrats unveil new energy plan

By Chris Baltimore

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**WASHINGTON** - Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives on Thursday unveiled a bill that would spend about \$15 billion to double U.S. automobile fuel efficiency, expand ethanol distribution and build more mass transit.

The so-called "Program for Real Energy Security Act," to be introduced next week, is the second energy bill Democrats have proposed since taking control of Congress in January.

The House in January passed a bill that would roll back energy industry tax breaks and force companies to pay more drilling royalties, valued at \$14 billion over a decade. That bill has not seen action in the Senate yet.

The new bill, backed by House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and about 100 other lawmakers, could form the basis of energy legislation House Speaker Nancy Pelosi wants to call for a vote before the chamber recesses in August.

The bill would fund research into ways to double U.S. automobile fuel efficiency, focusing on hydrogen, fuel cells, plug-in hybrids and other high-tech ideas. It would give grants to build more public transit and commuter rail systems, Hoyer said.

It also would reimburse companies for installing new pumps at service stations to dispense gasoline blended with 85 percent ethanol, as well as tanks to hold the fuel, which because of its corrosive properties cannot be stored with gasoline blended only from crude.

Rep. Joe Barton of Texas, senior Republican on the House Energy Committee, called the bill a "starting point for real energy legislation," but criticized Democrats for not backing more supply-oriented ideas like drilling for oil in Alaska or the offshore waters where energy exploration is now banned.

"We'll need to sort out costs and benefits, see what can be accomplished without forcing people to change the way they live, and figure out how new technologies can be made affordable," Barton said.

The bill takes a different tack than a plan proposed by President George W. Bush in January which calls for Congress to require a five-fold increase in ethanol use by 2017.

"It's very nice to produce biofuels but if we can't deliver them to energy users, they won't be helpful," Hoyer said.

Boosting the so-called "renewable fuels standard" to require more ethanol use and requiring U.S. automakers to make more fuel-efficient cars are "possible add-ons" to the bill, he said.

Hoyer said the bill also would offer a stimulus to help rail freight shippers build more tanker cars to transport ethanol. Railroads and tanker trucks are the primary way of transporting ethanol, which cannot be shipped in the U.S. pipeline network.