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## On tour of auto plants, Bush tries to boost energy plan

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U.S. President George W. Bush, driven to get his energy plan going, said Tuesday that Congress should approve his ideas before the peak travel season hits this summer.

"That would be a good sign that we recognize that we've got a problem here in America, and we aim to solve it together," Bush said at a Ford Motor Co. assembly plant that makes hybrid cars.

The Democratic-led Congress shares his goals of reducing reliance on foreign oil, raising fuel efficiency and minimizing emissions that contribute to global warming. But lawmakers have their own ideas about how to do it, with some saying Bush's plan lacks teeth and urgency.

Bush wants to increase the production of alternative fuels and the efficiency of cars, with a goal that lasts beyond his presidency: a 20 percent reduction in gas consumption over 10 years.

"I think it's achievable," Bush declared. "And one way for me to make the case that it's achievable is to remind people of the new technologies that are being developed."

Ahead of his travels, the White House said it had sent Bush's alternative-fuels legislation to leaders of the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

Bush has made a point of touting hybrids. The White House went so far as to park battery-powered autos on the South Lawn last month, and Bush declared them to be "living proof" that people can make choices to reduce energy use. But hybrids remain just a curiosity to many.

"I don't think our citizens understand what is happening in America, and that's why I've come to highlight the technological changes that we're seeing," Bush said.

The White House is asking Congress for the power to raise fuel-efficiency standards, so that it can raise them 4 percent a year, starting in 2010 for cars and 2012 for light trucks.

Bush, however, opposes putting numerical standards into law; he wants regulators to decide, taking into account how any changes could affect choices for consumers and safety of the cars.

"President Bush is leaving fuel economy standards up to chance," said Kevin Curtis, senior vice president of National Environmental Trust. "His proposal just asks Congress for a bunch of regulatory flexibility and tells the rest of us to hope for the best."

Bush's energy plan also calls on Congress to require the annual use of 35 billion gallons of alternative fuels such as **biodiesel** by 2017, a fivefold increase over current requirements. That would mean increasing production of ethanol from switchgrass, wood chips and other raw products.

Automakers have been encouraged by Bush's push for alternative fuels, which could create a stronger market for the cars they make that run on blends of ethanol, gasoline and **biodiesel**.