
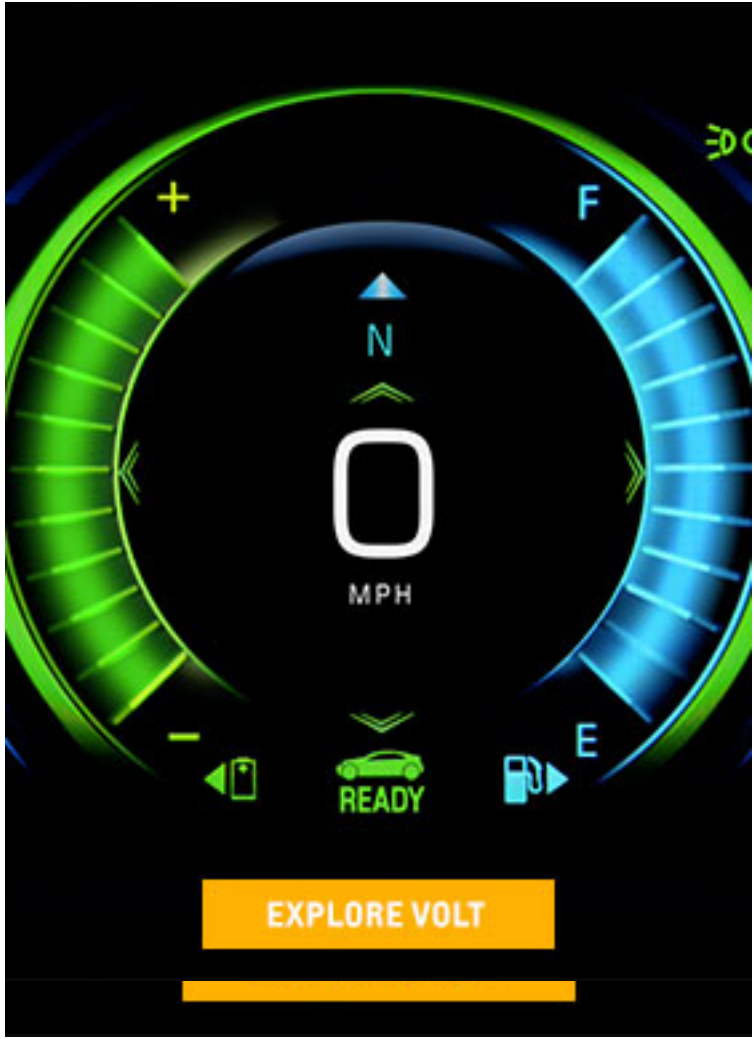


- Earlier this year, EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson ruled that greenhouse gas emissions endanger public health and welfare. That triggered EPA’s authority to regulate those emissions under the Clean Air Act. EPA now is moving forward on regulations that would limit emissions from large polluters starting in 2011, signaling that if Congress and the marketplace don’t force a cut in U.S. carbon, EPA will.
- The economic stimulus bill contained tens of billions of dollars for clean energy technologies ranging from high-speed rail to home weatherization, and from solar power to battery storage. It was the biggest energy bill ever passed by Congress. Most of those funds are only now beginning to move into the economy. The U.S. Department of Energy predicts “the next three months will be the most exciting time for the clean-technology industry in the last decade” with new grants issued every 10 days to two weeks.
- In September, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar created a [Climate Change Response Council](#) to coordinate the department’s actions on global warming. That’s important because Interior has jurisdiction over one-fifth of our nation’s landmass, 1.7 billion acres on the Outer Continental Shelf, drinking water supplies for 31 million Americans and irrigation water for 140,000 farmers. The announcement followed Salazar’s decision last March to move toward substantial renewable energy production on public lands.
- EPA and the Department of Transportation have proposed standards to increase the fuel efficiency of cars and light trucks in the U.S. by 40 percent between 2012 and 2016. The new standards will cut carbon emissions by nearly a billion tons and reduce oil consumption by nearly 2 billion barrels. [Dan Becker](#) of the Safe Climate Campaign called this action “the single biggest step the American government has ever taken to cut greenhouse-gas emissions.”
- In Pittsburgh last month, the [G-20 endorsed Obama’s proposal](#) to eliminate fossil energy subsidies totaling about 300 billion annually. That huge step, as important symbolically as it is substantively, would cut greenhouse gas emissions an estimated 10 percent by mid-century and phase out the idiotic practice of supporting the fuels most responsible for anthropogenic climate change. The G-20’s staff is developing the details.
- The administration has asked Congress to [repeal a number of domestic tax breaks](#) for fossil energy industries on grounds that energy prices should reflect true costs and that economic policy should support Obama’s goal to create a clean energy economy. According to the [Environmental Law Institute](#), the federal government provided more than 70 billion in subsidies to fossil energy industries from 2002 to 2008, more than twice the subsidies provided to renewable energy.
- In one of his first acts as president, Obama issued an order that removed the gag and shackles from federal climate scientists, who then issued a [long-suppressed report](#) on the harsh and disruptive impacts climate change will have on every region of the United States.
- Earlier this month, the president issued a comprehensive [executive order](#) that directs federal agencies, which collectively are America’s biggest energy consumer, to establish absolute goals for carbon-cuts, to reduce petroleum use in the federal vehicle fleet by 30 percent, to implement a net-zero-energy requirement for federal buildings and to add sustainability requirements to federal contracts.
- The administration is seeking bilateral climate agreements with other key nations, believing they are the [“building blocks to an agreement at Copenhagen.”](#) In July, the administration signed a memorandum of understanding with China on energy, climate and environmental cooperation. The president reportedly will seek further collaborations next month when he goes to China, followed by a meeting with the prime minister of India in Washington.

Given this list (and these are just the highlights), why do we need the Senate

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THE NEW CHEVROLET VOLT



EXPLORE VOLT

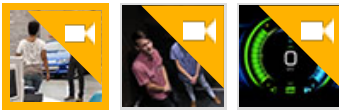
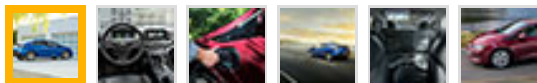
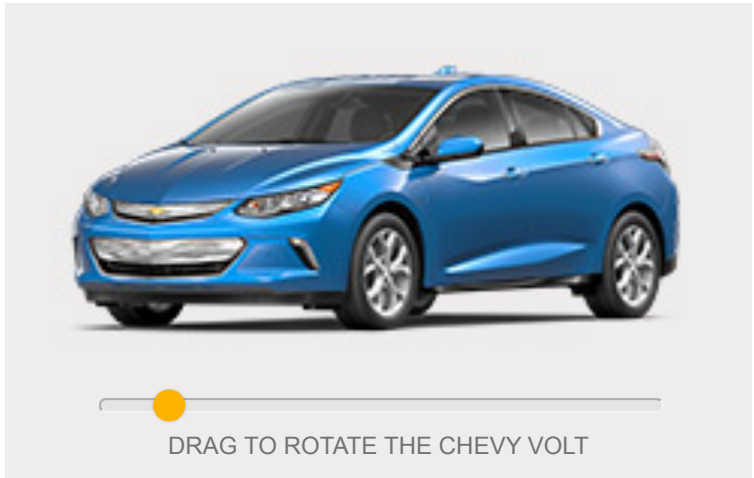


IMAGE GALLERY



TAKE THIS VOLT FOR A SPIN



to pass a bill in November?

First, executive orders are no substitute for laws. Presidential orders are impermanent. They are created with the stroke of a pen, and they can be reversed with the stroke of the pen by future presidents. Laws also can be reversed, of course, but not nearly so easily. Many of the nation’s landmark environmental laws, such as the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, were passed by Congress decades ago and remain in force today.

Second, Senate action would affirm that the United States may finally be ready to move beyond its intransigence over the Kyoto Protocol to help ratify an international climate deal. The Senate sent a positive signal in 2005 when, by a vote of 54-43, it approved a resolution stating that:

Congress should enact a comprehensive and effective program of mandatory, market based limits and incentives on emissions of greenhouse gases that slow, stop and reverse the growth of such emissions at a rate and in a manner that will not significantly harm the United States economy and will encourage comparable action by other nations that are major trading partners and key contributors to global emissions.

But it was the Senate’s vote in 1997 — 95-0 for the [Byrd-Hagel resolution](#) — that sticks in the minds of the international community. It made clear the upper house would not consent to ratification of any agreement that did not include “specific scheduled commitments (by developing countries) to limit or reduce greenhouse gas emissions.” That remains the position of many political leaders in the United States today, including some who speak for the administration.

In addition, the Senate’s overall record on international environmental agreements leaves room for uncertainty over its reaction to a climate deal. The Senate has voted in favor of ratification for 69 percent of the environmental treaties it has considered over the past 20 years, but several have been languishing for a long time. As of last March, agreements in legislative limbo included the Law of the Sea Treaty submitted to the Senate in 1994; the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species submitted to the Senate in 1983; the Convention on Biological Diversity submitted to the Senate in 1993; the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants submitted to the Senate in 2002; and the 1996 Protocol to the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes, submitted to the Senate in 2007.

At the moment, our political leaders are sending very mixed signals on whether the Senate will pass a climate bill before Copenhagen. After Carol Browner was quoted predicting no bill this year, Sen. [Barbara Boxer](#) rushed to declare that passage is still possible. Democrat Sen. John Kerry and Republican Sen. [Lindsey Graham](#) expressed joint optimism in an [op-ed for the New York Times](#):

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We are confident that a legitimate bipartisan effort can put America back in the lead again and can empower our negotiators to sit down at the table in Copenhagen in December and insist that the rest of the world join us in producing a new international agreement on global warming. That way, we will pass on to future generations a strong economy, a clean environment and an energy-independent nation.

Let’s hope the optimists are correct. Big hurdles remain in the way of an international climate deal; getting over them will require all the momentum we can muster. It would be sweet indeed if the Obama administration struck substantive bilateral agreements with China and India next month. But nothing would be sweeter than a November Miracle from the U.S. Senate.

As they take up the climate issue, Senators should reflect on how the people of other nations see us in the United States. Other nations know we are responsible for nearly a third of the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere today. They know we remain one of the world’s principal sources of new emissions. Refusing to take responsibility for those facts, openly and proactively, makes us less than moral.

However, they also know our history. In the past, we have been the world’s best example of innovation, compassion and generosity even when, as in World War II, we had to put American lives, lifestyles and treasure on the line. As I’ve traveled overseas, I’ve heard again and again that leadership from the United States remains the world’s best hope for ending extreme poverty while avoiding the extreme suffering and instability that would come from unmitigated climate change.

That hope is both flattering and daunting. My hope is that it will not be misplaced.

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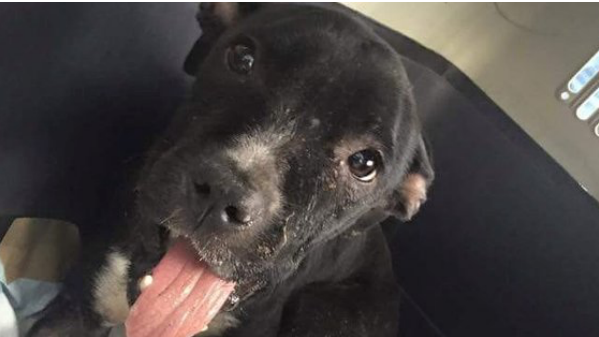
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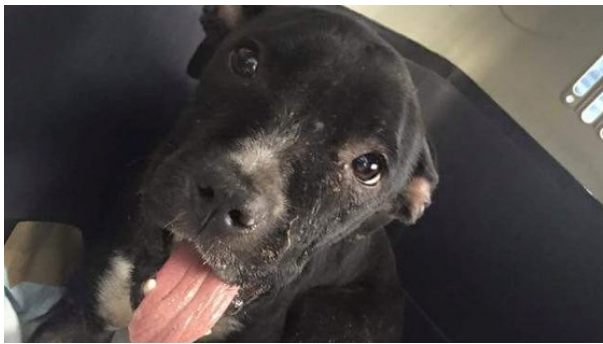
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