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## Bush Seeks Vast, Mandatory Increase in Alternative Fuels and Greater Vehicle Efficiency

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 23 — Vowing to reduce the nation's thirst for foreign oil, President Bush called on Tuesday for a huge government-mandated increase in renewable fuels — mainly ethanol — and tougher mileage standards for cars and light trucks.

It was the second year in a row that Mr. Bush made “energy security” a focal point of his State of the Union address, but his proposals on Tuesday were modest, and perhaps less achievable, than those he made a year ago when he said the nation was “addicted to oil.”

The centerpiece of Mr. Bush's proposal, which he said would cut the projected use of gasoline by 20 percent over the next decade, was a nearly fivefold mandatory increase in the production of ethanol and other alternative fuels for cars and trucks. The most obvious beneficiaries would be makers of ethanol and other biofuels, but it could also promote the production of liquefied coal.

Mr. Bush called for a mandatory requirement that makers of fuel produce 35 billion gallons of alternative fuels a year by 2017, replacing about 15 percent of the projected gasoline use in that year.

A second major plank of Mr. Bush's energy proposal calls for increasing fuel-efficiency standards of cars and trucks by 4 percent a year — about one mile per gallon — starting in 2010 for cars and 2012 for trucks.

That was a significant change from Mr. Bush's approach last year, when he called for “reform” of the corporate average fuel economy, or CAFE, rules, but avoided suggesting specific mileage requirements.

In a third proposal, Mr. Bush called for doubling the amount of oil in the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to about 1.5 billion barrels of oil. The doubling would take place at a snail's pace over the next 20 years. Even so, advance word of the idea helped push up oil prices by \$2.46 a barrel on Tuesday to \$55.04.

“It's a big change that the president has endorsed these new fuel-efficiency standards,” said Frederick W. Smith, the chief executive of the FedEx Corporation and a co-chairman of the Energy Security Leadership Council, a group of executive and retired military officers. These standards, he said, match their recommendations, “which are achievable.”

But the proposals face an array of obstacles, both practical and political. On a practical level, skeptics noted that Mr. Bush's goal for ethanol would require big advances in “cellulosic ethanol,” a form of ethanol made from plants like switchgrass that has yet to be produced at anything close to competitive prices. It could also require up to 40 million additional acres devoted to growing the plant material involved as well as a sprawling

new infrastructure for transforming the feedstock into fuel.

On a political level, Mr. Bush faces a Congress that is now controlled by Democrats, some of whom criticized him on Tuesday for proposing little to reduce the production of heat-trapping gases implicated in [global warming](#).

“I am disappointed,” said Senator Jeff Bingaman, Democrat of New Mexico and chairman of the Senate Energy Committee. He said Mr. Bush was “completely silent” on energy efficiency and reduction of carbon dioxide from electric power plants, which contribute 40 percent of these emissions.

Cars and trucks account for about one-third of heat-trapping gases that result from burning fossil fuels. Electric utilities and other “smokestack” sources were not addressed.

“If this was a real effort to solve the climate problem, it would include large stationary sources and utilities,” said Eileen Claussen, president of the Pew Center on Global Climate Change, a nonpartisan policy research group.

Ms. Claussen and other environmental leaders also criticized the absence of any proposal for a mandatory cap on emissions of heat-trapping gases.

Many supporters of ethanol and other renewable fuels praised Mr. Bush’s proposals. The [Union of Concerned Scientists](#) estimated that the mileage requirement could save 550,000 barrels of oil per day in 2017, and reduce emissions equivalent to “taking 14 million of today’s cars and trucks off the road.”

But many cautioned that the goals would be difficult to attain, might do little to reduce gas emissions and could lead to higher food prices as farmers cater to energy demand rather than food production.

Philip Clapp, president of the National Environmental Trust, said, “The big numbers may sound impressive, but this is nothing more than stay-the-course on global warming.” The proposal, Mr. Clapp said, represents a 1.5 percent cut in carbon emissions a decade hence. “They will still go up by 14 percent over the next decade.”

And if liquefied coal, which produces double the heat-trapping gases of regular gasoline, is part of the alternative-fuel mix — as coal-industry lobbyists and environmental groups say is the case — the emissions reductions would fall significantly.

Mr. Bush called for increasing the requirement for annual production of alternative fuels to 35 billion gallons a year. That would almost quintuple the current mandate of producing 7.5 billion gallons of ethanol by 2012. Spurred by tax breaks and soaring oil prices, ethanol production has climbed rapidly and is expected to hit 6 billion gallons this year.

But energy analysts say that corn-based ethanol, which accounts for virtually all of today’s production, will not be able to produce more than about half as much alternative fuel as Mr. Bush envisions by 2017.

Mr. Bush also laced his proposals with numerous “safety valves” that could delay attainment of his goals.

*Alexei Barrionuevo contributed reporting from Chicago, and Matthew L. Wald from Washington.*