

Veto threat should spur fixes in energy bill

by *The Detroit News*

A threatened presidential veto will hopefully force the House to retool the energy bill compromise it reached last weekend to remove some of the more objectionable components.

The White House is signaling that President George W. Bush will veto the deal that sets tougher fuel economy mandates for automakers if it comes to his desk. The president is said to be particularly concerned that the proposal leaves too much uncertainty about which federal agency has the final word in setting mileage standards.

The deal brokered by Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., authorizes the National Transportation Safety Board to set corporate average fuel economy at 35 miles per gallon by 2020.

But it leaves the door open for the Environmental Protection Agency and individual states to demand harsher levels to control carbon dioxide emissions. It would be an unfair burden on the auto industry to require it to build different vehicles for different states. It is also unreasonable to demand the automakers undertake the expense of developing technology to meet the congressional mandate and then have to switch gears to meet different numbers from the EPA. Bush also objects to a demand in the bill that utilities get 15 percent of their electrical power from renewable energy sources by 2020. It is dangerous for Congress to set regulatory standards ahead of the technology to meet those mandates, particularly in the vital area of energy production. A rigid requirement for renewables could severely affect economic growth.

There are other problems with the bill, not the least of which is that raising CAFE standards without increasing the cost of fuel will not achieve the goal of cutting oil imports. But it will take \$85 billion out of the pockets of the Big Three automakers - money that could be used to develop vehicles the market would actually support.

Congress should heed the veto warning and go back to work on a bill that assures America has a steady supply of energy, and uses it wisely, but one that does not place the economy at risk.

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