Obama Wants Research to Wean Vehicles Off Oil

WASHINGTON (AP) -- President Barack Obama is pushing the U.S. Congress to authorize $2 billion over 10 years for federally funded research into clean energy technologies that can wean automobiles off oil.

Obama proposed the idea of an energy security trust last month in his State of the Union address, but this the first time he put a price tag on the idea, during a trip Friday to the Argonne National Laboratory outside Chicago. The White House says the research would be paid for with revenue from federal oil and gas leases on offshore drilling and would not add to the deficit.

The proposal is modeled after a plan submitted by a group of business executives and former military leaders who are committed to reducing U.S. oil dependence. The group headed by FedEx Corp. Chairman and CEO Frederick W. Smith and retired Marine Corps Gen. P.X. Kelley, however, had proposed a much larger $3 billion annual investment.

The federal money would fund research on "breakthrough" technologies such as batteries for electric cars and biofuels made from switch grass or other materials. Researchers also would look to improve use of natural gas as a fuel for cars and trucks.

Creation of the trust would require congressional approval at a time of partisan divide over energy issues. Obama tried to appeal to both parties by pitching the policy not just as an environmental issue, but a job-creation plan that would keep the United States as a technology leader.

"If a nonpartisan coalition of CEOs and retired generals and admirals can get behind this idea, then so can we," Obama said in his State of the Union address. "Let's take their advice and free our families and businesses from the painful spikes in gas prices we've put up with for far too long."

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