

Tesla Drivers in Congress Like Their Cars, Split on Elon Musk

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Photographer: Al Drago/Bloomberg
Elon Musk

[Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#) wants to sell her Tesla. [Ted Cruz](#) is considering buying one.

Driving an electric car manufactured by Elon Musk's company is an increasingly loaded decision for lawmakers. Stepping out of one in the Capitol Hill parking lot can be a signal of support for renewable energy — but with Musk's dive into partisanship, it also can be a political symbol.

The [Tesla Inc.](#) chief executive officer has recently delighted Republicans by announcing his backing of the GOP and unleashing a stream of criticism of Democrats, unions and what he calls the “woke mind virus.”

“He’s a billionaire. I could care less what he thinks,” Ocasio-Cortez, a progressive Democrat who recently had a Twitter dustup with Musk, said when asked about his support for the GOP.

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Ocasio-Cortez bought her Model 3 to travel between Washington and her Bronx-Queens district after Covid-19 hit in 2020. Now, the New York representative wants to ditch it for an electric vehicle made by unionized workers. “At the time, it was the only EV that could get me from New York to Washington on like one, or one-and-a-half charges,” she said. “I would love to switch.”

The only union-made electric vehicles for sale in the U.S. are the Chevrolet Bolt, the slightly larger Bolt EUV and Ford's F-150 Lightning pickup. Only the Bolt was available for sale in 2020.

Texas Republican Senator Cruz, who represents the state most identified with the fossil-fuel industry, welcomes Musk to the Republican Party, and has called his [planned acquisition of Twitter Inc.](#) “the most important development for free speech in decades.” He’s ecstatic that Musk has become a Texan to boot.

“When Elon moved to Texas, I spent 45 minutes on the phone with him, urging him to come to Texas and saying, ‘Look, we like jobs in Texas, we don’t want you to shut down, we want you to come here and hire a bunch of Texans,’” Cruz said. In addition to Tesla’s Gigafactory and headquarters in Texas, Musk’s SpaceX has a launch site near the Texas-Mexico border town of Boca Chica.

[Read More: Elon Musk’s Texas Empire](#)

While there isn’t a full accounting of how many federal lawmakers own Teslas, at least 10 representatives or senators have them, according to a tally by Bloomberg News. Many of the members of what might be called the Tesla caucus are those that might be expected to have interest in a zero-emission car, such as Green New Deal co-author Ocasio-Cortez and Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Chair [Tom Carper](#).

But not all of their Tesla-driving peers fit that profile. Republican Representative [Thomas Massie](#) of Kentucky is likely the only Tesla Model S driver in Congress with a “[Friends of Coal](#)” license plate. Massie was one of the first Tesla converts in Congress, taking delivery in January 2013 after a lengthy wait.

“The one I drive is serial number 3,347,” Massie said proudly.



Source: twitter.com/RepThomasMassie
Republican Rep. Thomas Massie's Tesla.

An MIT-trained engineer, Massie says he owns just one individual stock — Tesla — which he bought after [installing a battery from a crashed Model S](#) to back up the solar panels at his off-the-grid home. A 2020 financial disclosure form shows Massie's Tesla shares were worth between \$15,001 and \$50,000.

"This is not a car company, it's a battery company," he said. "The car is just their first killer app."

Massie said he is less likely to support antitrust legislation aimed at big tech companies, after getting close to backing the idea, now that Musk has agreed to acquire a major social media platform.

"But then Elon comes in, buys Twitter," he said. "This might be what I'm looking for."

While Musk's persona is heavily intertwined with his brands, Democrats are often choosing to separate the man from the vehicle. Carper sold his beloved Chrysler Town and Country minivan with about 600,000 miles last year and replaced it with a red Tesla Model Y. A new long-range Model Y now costs more than \$64,000 after destination and fees and before taxes.

“It is just so much fun to drive,” said the senator from Delaware, adding he’s saving a lot on gasoline. “I’m able to charge it at home, plug it in at 10 o’clock at night when electricity rates are pretty low, so it’s quite a bargain.”

Other Tesla-owning Democrats — including Intelligence Chairman Adam Schiff of California, David Cicilline of Rhode Island, Lisa Blunt Rochester of Delaware and Tom Malinowski of New Jersey — also keep Musk’s rightward political tack out of their car choice.

Musk doesn’t make it easy, however, for lawmakers to ignore him. The world’s richest person also is CEO of SpaceX, which is a major government contractor. Tesla’s driver-assistance feature known as Autopilot is subject to investigations by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and the Federal Trade Commission is reviewing Musk’s bid for Twitter over antitrust concerns, though it’s unlikely to stand in the way of the deal closing.

[Read More: Tesla’s Autopilot Stirs US Alarm as ‘Disaster Waiting to Happen’](#)

Arizona Senator Mark Kelly, who has done consulting work for SpaceX, is another Democratic Tesla driver in Congress.

Kelly owns a black Model S Performance that he says can accelerate from 0 to 60 mph in a little more than 2 seconds. “This car is a lot of fun to drive. It’s also generally good for the environment, right? Zero emissions.” Kelly represents a state where gasoline prices are higher than the national average.



Photographer: Tom Williams/CQ-Roll Call/Getty Images
Sen. Mark Kelly walks to his Tesla outside the US Capitol in 2021.

Kelly's also piloted a space shuttle and an A6-E Intruder attack aircraft for the Navy, so he has some credibility when he calls Musk "a very good engineer." He looks at Musk's plans for Twitter through that lens. "There's engineering, especially software engineering, behind any kind of application, even Twitter — there's always room for improvement," he said. "We'll see."

Senator [Martin Heinrich](#) of New Mexico was an early buyer of a Tesla Model 3 who worked on a solar-powered electric car as an engineering student at the University of Missouri.

Heinrich, like most of the Democrats, sees Musk as a man full of contrasts.

"I'm not a Musk fan, but I appreciate, like, he is both brilliant and incredibly arrogant," he said. "People can separate these things. Should he pay more taxes? Yes. Do I want him to stop making cars? Absolutely not."

--With assistance from Zach Cohen.

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