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Bright the latest Indiana electric vehicle startup to call it quits

Company cites Energy Department bureaucracy





Bright Automotive planned to build the Bright Idea plug-in hybrid commercial van. (Handout)



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By Julie Wernau Tribune reporter 11:57 a.m. CST, February 29, 2012

Just when it seemed like things couldn't get worse, Indiana received more bad news on the electric vehicle front Wednesday as another promising hopeful announced it would call it quits.

Bright Automotive, which is based in Anderson, Ind., and planned to deliver 300 manufacturing jobs to the state by 2012 pending a loan from the Department of Energy's Advanced Technology Vehicle Manufacturing Program, announced Wednesday that it has withdrawn its DOE application and will wind down operations in Indiana

In a scathing letter to Energy Secretary **Steven Chu**, Bright Automotive Chief Executive Reuben Munger and Chief Operating Officer Mike Donoughe described an overly bureaucratic process and called the department ineffective in its mission to meet President **Barack Obama**'s goal of adding one million plug-in vehicles to the road by 2015.

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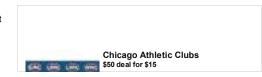
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In the end, the company said it was the department's constantly changing terms, outlined in a series of "near final" commitment letters, that forced the company "to say 'uncle.'

"The actions -- or better said 'lack of action' -- by your team means hundreds of great manufacturing and technical jobs, union and non-union alike, and thousands of indirect jobs in Indiana and Michigan will not see the light of day," the men wrote.

Bright had received incentive packages at the state, county and local levels in Indiana and Michigan in its quest to build a plug-in hybrid commercial vehicle. But it said without a DOE loan, it would not be

able to move forward with its production plans.

"We understand that this is a difficult day for Bright Automotive and their workers. Over the last three years, the Department has worked with the company to try to negotiate a deal that supported their business while protecting the taxpayers. In the end, we were not able to come to an agreement on terms that would protect the taxpayers," said DOE spokesman Damien LaVera.

The company has waited to learn the status of its application since 2008 and said it was told several times that it was weeks away from approval.

"We asked our team members on countless occasions to work literally around the clock whenever yet another new DOE requirement came down the pike," they wrote.

DOE's most recent set of conditions, combined with the long wait, the company said, were "so outlandish that more rational and objective persons would likely conclude that your team was negotiating in bad faith."

The company said it may instead decide to develop the technology in China. Officials in Indiana and Michigan could not immediately be reached for comment.

Indiana Gov. **Mitch Daniels** set out in January 2010 to make Indiana the "the electric vehicle state." Last year, Think, an electric vehicle maker in Elkhart propped up by government incentives, filed for bankruptcy. A month ago, Ener1, the battery maker that was to supply the vehicle from three manufacturing facilities in Indiana, also filed for Chapter 11. In addition to Bright Automotive, another unrelated plug-in manufacturer the state tried to nurture has yet to get off the ground.

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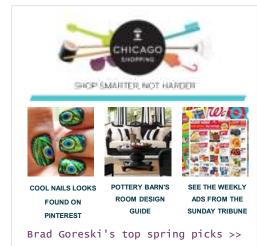
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