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Administration Ties Clean Energy to Jobs

President says leading the global economy is at stake

In his 2010 State of the Union address, President Obama identified passing a “comprehensive energy and climate bill” as critical to the nation’s economic recovery through the creation of new jobs.

“I know that there are those who disagree with the overwhelming scientific evidence on climate change,” the president said. “But here’s the thing: Even if you doubt the evidence, providing incentives for energy efficiency and clean energy are the right thing to do for our future, because the nation that leads the clean energy economy will be the nation that leads the global economy. And America must be that nation.”

China, Germany and India are rebuilding their infrastructure and making serious investments in clean energy because they want those jobs, Obama said.

“As hard as it may be, as uncomfortable and contentious as the debates may become, it’s time to get serious about fixing the problems that are hampering our growth,” he noted. “We need to encourage American innovation.”

Obama said the country needs to build a new generation of nuclear power plants, make tough decisions about opening new offshore areas for oil and gas development and continue investing in advanced biofuels. He never mentioned cap and trade—a politically polarizing strategy for reducing the nation’s dependence on fossil fuels. Instead, he trumpeted the need to invest in clean coal technologies.

In February, the administration created a task force to speed up development of a system to capture carbon dioxide from coal combustion and store it permanently underground. The task force has 180 days to produce a plan that would provide an affordable solution in 10 years. Five to 10 commercial demonstration projects are planned by 2016.

In the administration’s 2011 budget request, the U.S. Energy Department would get the ability to guarantee an additional \$36 million in loans for construction of new nuclear plants—twice as much as the previous loan guarantee program.

The budget proposal eliminates funding for the Yucca Mountain, Nevada, repository for nuclear waste, which the administration terms “not a workable option.” Meanwhile, it increases spending on managing the nation’s nuclear stockpile and naval reactors by 10 percent compared to this year, boosting it to \$8.1 billion.

The administration also has proposed \$500 million in credit subsidies to support \$3 billion to \$5 billion in loan guarantees for energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. The Energy Department would continue to spend money authorized by the 2009 stimulus bill.

“We should put more Americans to work building clean energy facilities and give rebates to Americans who make their homes more energy efficient, which supports clean energy jobs,” Obama said during his State of the Union address. ■

ENERGY TIP: For more details about the administration’s position on energy and the environment, see www.whitehouse.gov/issues/energy-and-environment. To support members of Congress who are seeking nonregulatory solutions to climate change issues, join the nationwide Our Energy, Our Future grassroots campaign at www.ourenergy.coop.

Co-ops to EPA: Use the Right Tool for the Job

Climate change legislation remains stalled in Congress, but the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is taking steps to regulate carbon dioxide under the federal Clean Air Act.

“The Clean Air Act wasn’t intended to deal with carbon dioxide,” says Glenn English, chief executive officer of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. “Using it to regulate greenhouse gas emissions would essentially be like using a hammer to tighten a screw—you may eventually get that screw hammered in, but using the right tool makes more sense and does the job without unintended harm.”

In its modern form, the Clean Air Act was passed in 1970 to control specific pollutants on a local and regional basis. In 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court determined the term “pollutant” includes carbon dioxide, and left it up to EPA to decide whether to take action. EPA subsequently issued a finding that included carbon dioxide among other emissions that endanger public health and welfare.

Several U.S. House and Senate members have introduced bipartisan proposals to stop EPA from using the Clean Air Act in this way.

“Affordable electric bills must be at the heart of this debate, and we’re fighting on behalf of consumers,” says English. “Leaving matters up to unelected EPA bureaucrats is a major step in the wrong direction.”