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January 27, 2010

Obama calls for broad energy portfolio

President Obama used his first-ever State of the Union speech to tout the benefits of all forms of energy -- from renewable wind and solar to nuclear power and conventional oil and gas -- in helping create new American jobs and rebuild the nation's battered economy.

"To create more of these clean energy jobs, we need more production, more efficiency, more incentives," Obama said. "That means building a new generation of safe, clean nuclear power plants in this country."

And, Obama said, "it means making tough decisions about opening new offshore areas for oil and gas development."

The muted signal that the country should consider expanding offshore drilling could win praise from the energy industry, which has been critical of his administration's management of federal leasing for oil and gas development on public lands and the outer continental shelf. Jack Gerard, president of the American Petroleum Institute, on Tuesday complained that total leased acreage had taken a nosedive under Obama's watch.

Karen Matusic, an API spokesman, said the industry "would welcome greater access to America's vast oil and and gas resources."

"This would not just bring more energy and huge numbers of jobs," Matusic said. "It could also mean billions of dollars more in government revenues and less reliance on imported energy . . . But to create these jobs, we will need policies that encourage, not discourage, investment."

Oil and gas leaders were expected to be critical of Obama's proposal to cut tax incentives they have long used to defray the capital costs of energy production. "At a time of record deficits, we will not continue tax cuts for oil companies," Obama said.



Associated Press photo

A business manager walks by solar panels on the roof of the Cade winery in Angwin, Calif. During his State of the Union speech, Obama repeatedly emphasized "clean energy," including renewable solar and wind power.

kind of energy in America."

Legislation capping carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases blamed for global warming passed the House last year, but it is facing resistance in the Senate. Republicans have widely rejected the leading plan as an "energy tax" that would raise fuel costs and electricity bills for consumers. Moderate Democrats and those from coal-producing and heavy manufacturing states also oppose major parts of the leading climate change legislation.

Charles Drevna, president of the National Petrochemical and Refiners Association, noted that Obama only mildly prodded Congress to act.

"We're pleased that the president chose not to aggressively press for cap-and-trade legislation that would only put more Americans out of work and ensure a continued economic decline," Drevna said. "President Obama should be applauded for turning his attention to the economy, jobs, continued investment in innovation, and increased domestic energy production. A cap-and-trade climate bill would only run counterproductive to his objectives."

Last year, Obama proposed the tax hikes in his budget request to Congress, but lawmakers largely ignored the request.

Obama made at least 10 references to "clean energy," and embraced a broad energy portfolio, including "continued investment in advanced biofuels and clean coal technologies."

He also called on Congress to pass "a comprehensive energy and climate bill with incentives that will finally make clean energy the profitable

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About the blogger

Tom Fowler is a Houston Chronicle energy reporter.

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