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President Obama sounds energy alert

By **Mike Wereschagin**
PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW
Thursday, June 3, 2010

With a high-tech research university in the middle of a coal-rich region as his backdrop, President Obama said Wednesday the country must "aggressively accelerate" its transition from fossil fuels to clean energy.

"The time has come, once and for all, for this nation to fully embrace a clean energy future," Obama told 300 people in the Wiegand Gymnasium at Carnegie Mellon University in Oakland. It was Obama's first trip to the region since back-to-back appearances at the G-20 and AFL-CIO convention in September.

As oil continues to pump in record amounts from a snapped drill head on the Gulf of Mexico's seabed, Obama renewed his call for "finally putting a price on carbon pollution," something the House tried last year by passing a climate change bill that would cap carbon emissions.

The proposal continues to meet heavy opposition in coal-dependent regions such as Western Pennsylvania and West Virginia, and state GOP Chairman Rob Gleason promised to use the issue to attack Democrats.

"Pennsylvania's core economic future is tied to fossil fuels," Gleason said. "A vote for any Democratic" candidate is a vote against coal mines, natural gas extraction and oil drilling, he said. "I'm surprised he's taking this on."

Three of the state's four Public Utility Commission members, two of whom still serve on the board, sent a letter to the state's congressional delegation in May 2009 warning about "a profound adverse impact on the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania," including "a net loss of as many as 66,000 jobs."

The price of inaction, however, includes billions of dollars being shipped overseas monthly, often to countries at odds with the interests of the United States, Obama said. Beyond the immediate questions of whether the BP oil rig catastrophe -- the worst oil spill in the country's history -- was human error "or corporations taking dangerous shortcuts," is the problem of tapping increasingly hard-to-reach caches of oil.

"We have to acknowledge that there are inherent risks in drilling four miles beneath the surface of the earth -- risks that are bound to increase, the harder oil extraction becomes. Just like we have to acknowledge that an America run solely on fossil fuels should not be the vision we have for our

Photo Gallery



President Barack Obama at Carnegie Mellon University

President Barack Obama delivers prepared comments to an invitation-only crowd at Carnegie Mellon University Wednesday, June 2, 2010.

Photos

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Taking the stage
Associated Press

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Getting ready
James Knox/Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

About the writer

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children and grandchildren," Obama said.

Senate Democrats have been unable to secure the 60 votes needed to break a threatened filibuster of the House cap-and-trade bill.

"Pittsburgh, I want you to know, the votes may not be there right now, but I intend to find them in the coming months," Obama said. "I will continue to make the case for a clean energy future wherever and whenever I can. I will work with anyone to get this done. And we will get this done."

DEMOCRATS' CHALLENGE

With Democrats heading into a difficult election year, and Gallup polling yesterday showing Republicans edging Democrats in generic congressional polling by 6 percentage points, Obama defended his administration's first 16 months.

He framed the November election as a choice between returning "to the failed policies of the past, or ... building a stronger future. We can go backward or we can keep moving forward."

Obama criticized Republicans' handling of the economy when the party was in power, and said Republicans have been obstructionists since before his inauguration.

"From our efforts to rescue the economy to health insurance reform to financial reform, most have sat on the sidelines and shouted from the bleachers," Obama said. "Before I was inaugurated, the congressional leaders of the other party got together and made a calculation that if I failed, they'd win."

He argued his administration's accomplishments "will make health care cheaper, our financial system more secure and our government less burdened by debt."

DEFICIT CONCERNS

The Congressional Budget Office predicts Obama's 2011 budget would increase deficit spending by a cumulative \$3.8 trillion over the next 10 years, when compared to keeping in place existing taxes and spending policies.

The CBO score did not take into account the health care law, which it estimates would reduce the deficit anywhere from \$28 billion to \$143 billion, a variable that depends on which programs Congress grants money.

"The Obama stimulus has failed to help Pittsburgh's shaky economy," Gleason said. "Since the stimulus was passed, Pittsburgh has lost over 13,000 jobs." Statewide, he said, 86,000 jobs have been lost.

Obama credited the stimulus with "breaking the freefall" and defended grants and tax credits in the bill, saying they would fuel future industries.

"I'm sure there were times this city couldn't imagine a life without steel mills," Obama said. But he said the region weathered the recession better than most, because "you prepared and adapted and invested in a better future, even if you weren't always sure what that future looked like."

Sen. Arlen Specter, D-Philadelphia, accompanied Obama to Pittsburgh on Air Force One. Rep. Jason Altmire, D-McCandless, whose office had said he would not go to the airport, joined Mayor Luke Ravenstahl to greet them at 12:30 p.m. Before speaking, Obama met with campaign workers, City Councilmen Doug Shields and Bruce Kraus, City Controller Michael Lamb and state Rep. Dan Frankel, D-Squirrel Hill.

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