

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks on Energy at Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland

March 31, 2010

Thank you, everybody. Thank you so much. Please have a seat. I've got a few introductions that I want to make very quickly before I start my remarks. First of all, I think that by the end of his tenure, we're going to know that Ken Salazar is one of the finest Secretaries of Interior we've ever had. So please give him a big round of applause.

Other members of what we call our green team are here: Steven Chu, our Secretary of Energy; Martha Johnson, the Administrator of the GSA; Nancy Sutley, the CEQ Chair. We've got Carol Browner, who's the White House Energy and Climate Change Director. Please give them a big round of applause. They've put in a lot of work.

Governor Martin O'Malley is here, Governor of Maryland. Ray Mabus, Secretary of the Navy, is here. Admiral Gary Roughead, Chief of Naval Operations, is here, and we appreciate his outstanding service. Thank you, Gar.

I want to thank Steven Shepro, the base commander here at Andrews, and the leadership that's present from the Air Force, the Marine Corps, and the Coast Guard.

Ken and I were colleagues in the Senate, and I appointed him because I knew that he would be a faithful and pragmatic steward of our natural resources. And as Secretary, he is changing the way that the Interior Department does business so that we're responsibly developing traditional sources of energy and renewable sources of energy, from the wind on the high plains to the suns in the desert to the waves off our coasts. And so I'm very grateful to the work that he's done, and it's culminating in one of the announcements that we're making today.

It's also good to see so many members of our Armed Forces here today. Andrews is the home of Air Force One, and I appreciate everything that you do for me and my family. I should point out that you've got a 100-percent ontime departure record. [*Laughter*] You don't charge for luggage—[*laughter*]—so it's a pretty good deal. And I want to thank you not only for the support that you provide me but also for the service that you perform to keep our country safe each and every day. So I'm very grateful to all of you.

We're here to talk about America's energy security, an issue that's been a priority for my administration since the day I took office. Already, we've made the largest investment in clean energy in our Nation's history. It's an investment that's expected to create or save more than 700,000 jobs across America, jobs manufacturing advanced batteries for more efficient vehicles, upgrading the power grid so that it's smarter and it's stronger, doubling our Nation's capacity to generate renewable electricity from sources like the wind and the sun.

And just a few months after taking office, I also gathered the leaders of the world's largest automakers, the heads of labor unions, environmental advocates, and public officials from California and across the country to reach a historic agreement to raise fuel economy standards in cars and trucks. And tomorrow, after decades in which we have done little to increase auto efficiency, those new standards will be finalized, which will reduce our dependence on oil while helping folks spend a little less at the pump.

So my administration is upholding its end of the deal, and we expect all parties to do the same. And I'd also point out, this rule that we're going to be announcing about increased mileage standards will save 1.8 billion dollars—billion barrels of oil overall—1.8 billion barrels of oil. And that's like taking 58 million cars off the road for an entire year.

Today we're also going to go one step further. In order to save energy and taxpayer dollars, my administration, led by Secretary Chu at Energy, as well as Administrator Johnson at GSA, is doubling the number of hybrid vehicles in the Federal fleet, even as we seek to reduce the number of cars and trucks used by our Government overall. So we're going to lead by example and practice what we preach: cutting waste, saving energy, and reducing our reliance on foreign oil.

But we have to do more. We need to make continued investments in clean coal technologies and advanced biofuels. A few weeks ago, I announced loan guarantees to break ground on America's first new nuclear facility in three decades, a project that will create thousands of jobs. And in the short term, as we transition to cleaner energy sources, we've still got to make some tough decisions about opening new offshore areas for oil and gas development in ways that protect communities and protect coastlines.

Now, this is not a decision that I've made lightly. It's one that Ken and I, as well as Carol Browner, my energy adviser, and others in my administration looked at closely for more than a year. But the bottom line is this: Given our energy needs, in order to sustain economic growth and produce jobs and keep our businesses competitive, we are going to need to harness traditional sources of fuel, even as we ramp up production of new sources of renewable, homegrown energy.

So today we're announcing the expansion of offshore oil and gas exploration, but in ways that balance the need to harness domestic energy resources and the need to protect America's natural resources. Under the leadership of Secretary Salazar, we'll employ new technologies that reduce the impact of oil exploration. We'll protect areas that are vital to tourism, the environment, and our national security. And we'll be guided not by political ideology, but by scientific evidence.

That's why my administration will consider potential areas for development in the mid- and south Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico while studying and protecting sensitive areas in the Arctic. That's why we'll continue to support development of leased areas off the North Slope of Alaska while protecting Alaska's Bristol Bay.

Now, there will be those who strongly disagree with this decision, including those who say we should not open any new areas to drilling. But what I want to emphasize is that this announcement is part of a broader strategy that will move us from an economy that runs on fossil fuels and foreign oil to one that relies more on homegrown fuels and clean energy. And the only way this transition will succeed is if it strengthens our economy in the short term and the long run. To fail to recognize this reality would be a mistake.

Now, on the other side, there are going to be some who argue that we don't go nearly far enough, who suggest we should open all our waters to energy exploration without any restriction or regard for the broader environmental and economic impact. And to those folks I've got to say this: We have less than 2 percent of the world's oil reserves; we consume more than 20 percent of the world's oil. And what that means is that drilling alone can't come close to meeting our long-term energy needs. And for the sake of our planet and our energy independence, we need to begin the transition to cleaner fuels now.

So the answer is not drilling everywhere all the time. But the answer is not, also, for us to ignore the fact that we are going to need vital energy sources to maintain our economic growth and our security. Ultimately, we need to move beyond the tired debates of the left and the right, between business leaders and environmentalists, between those who would claim drilling is a cure-all and those who would claim it has no place, because this issue's just too important to allow our progress to languish while we fight the same old battles over and over again.

For decades, we've talked about how our dependence on foreign oil threatens our economy, yet our will to act rises and falls with the price of a barrel of oil. When gas gets expensive at the pump, suddenly everybody's an energy expert. And when it goes back down, everybody's back to their old habits.

For decades, we've talked about the threat to future generations posed by our current system of energy, even as we can see the mounting evidence of climate change, from the Arctic Circle to the gulf coast. And—this is particularly relevant to all of you who are serving in uniform—for decades, we've talked about the risks to our security created by dependence on foreign oil, but that dependence has actually grown year after year after year after year.

And while our politics has remained entrenched along these worn divides, the ground has shifted beneath our feet. Around the world, countries are seeking an edge in the global marketplace by investing in new ways of producing and saving energy. From China to Germany, these nations recognize that the nation that leads the clean energy economy will be the country that leads the global economy. And meanwhile, here at home, as politicians in Washington debate endlessly about whether to act, our own military's determined that we can no longer afford not to.

Some of the press may be wondering why we are announcing offshore drilling in a hangar at Andrews Air Force Base. Well, if there's any doubt about the leadership that our military is showing, you just need to look at this F-18 fighter and the light armored vehicle behind me. The Army and Marine Corps have been testing this vehicle on a mixture of biofuels. And this Navy fighter jet, appropriately called the Green Hornet, will be flown for the first time in just a few days, on Earth Day. If tests go as planned, it will be the first plane ever to fly faster than the speed of sound on a fuel mix that is half biomass. The Air Force is also testing jet engines using biofuels and had the first successful biofuel-powered test flight just last week. I don't want to drum up any kind of rivalry here, but—*[laughter]*.

Now, the Pentagon isn't seeking these alternative fuels just to protect our environment; they're pursuing these homegrown energy sources to protect our national security. Our military leaders recognize the security imperative of increasing the use of alternative fuels, decreasing energy use, reducing our reliance on imported oil, making ourselves more energy efficient. And that's why the Navy, led by Secretary Mabus, who's here today, has set a goal of using 50 percent alternative fuels in all planes, vehicles, and ships in the next 10 years. That's why the Defense Department has invested \$2.7 billion this year alone to improve energy efficiency.

So moving towards clean energy is about our security. It's also about our economy. And it's about the future of our planet. And what I hope is, the policies that we've laid out—from hybrid fleets to offshore drilling, from nuclear energy to wind energy—underscores the seriousness with which my administration takes this challenge. It's a challenge that requires us to break out of the old ways of thinking, to think and act anew. And it requires each of us, regardless of whether we're in the private sector or the public sector, whether we're in the military or in the civilian side of Government, to think about how could we be doing things

better, how could we be doing things smarter so that we are no longer tethered to the whims of what happens somewhere in the Middle East or with other major oil-producing nations.

So I'm open to proposals from my Democratic friends and my Republican friends. I think that we can break out of the broken politics of the past when it comes to our energy policy. I know that we can come together to pass comprehensive energy and climate legislation that's going to foster new energy—new industries, create millions of new jobs, protect our planet, and help us become more energy independent. That's what we can do. That is what we must do. And I'm confident that is what we will do.

So thank you very much. And thanks, again, to all of you who are serving in our Armed Services. It—you are making an enormous contribution, and this is just one example of the leadership that you are showing.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:18 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Col. Steven M. Shepro, USAF, installation commander, Andrews Air Force Base, and commander, 316th Wing.

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