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President Obama: clean energy is key to 'lasting prosperity'

By Jon H. Harsch

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Perhaps reacting to complaints he hasn't done enough to promote the climate change legislation that's stalled in Congress, President Obama used a visit to research labs at MIT in Boston Friday as the platform to deliver a major address on clean energy and climate change.

Calling for moving as rapidly as possible from fossil fuels to renewable energy, Obama warned that the transformation is urgently needed because "The system of energy that powers our economy also undermines our security and endangers our planet." He acknowledged that "There's going to be a lot of debate about how we move from an economy that's importing oil to one that's exporting clean energy technology; how we harness the innovative potential on display here at MIT to create millions of new jobs; and how we will lead the world to prevent the worst consequences of climate change. There are going to be all sorts of debates, both in the laboratory and on Capitol Hill." But he said that despite naysayers – who will be heard from next week as Senate hearings begin on the Kerry-Boxer climate-change bill – "there's no question that we must do all these things."

Obama predicted that winning the race toward green energy will bring rewards: "Countries on every corner of this Earth now recognize that energy supplies are growing scarcer, energy demands are growing larger, and rising energy use imperils the planet we will leave to future generations. And that's why the world is now engaged in a peaceful competition to determine the technologies that will power the 21st century. From China to India, from Japan to Germany, nations everywhere are racing to develop new ways to produce and use energy. The nation that wins this competition will be the nation that leads the global economy. I am convinced of that. And I want America to be that nation."

To win the race, Obama explained, is "why the Recovery Act that we passed back in January makes the largest investment in clean energy in history, not just to help end this recession, but to lay a new foundation for lasting prosperity." He said "The Recovery Act includes \$80 billion to put tens of thousands of Americans to work developing new battery technologies for hybrid vehicles; modernizing the electric grid; making our homes and businesses more energy efficient; doubling our capacity to generate renewable

electricity. . . The Recovery Act, the stimulus bill, represents the largest single boost in scientific research in history.”

Obama said that as more people understand both the threat of climate change and the promise of renewable energy, “We’re now seeing prominent Republicans like Senator Lindsey Graham joining forces with long-time leader John Kerry on this issue, to swiftly pass a bill through the Senate.” But Obama also warned that “the closer we get, the harder the opposition will fight and the more we’ll hear from those whose interests or ideology run counter to the much needed action that we’re engaged in.”

Coinciding with Obama’s climate-change speech Friday, the conservative Accuracy in Media conference in Washington applauded British scientist Christopher Monckton for calling CO2 “a harmless trace gas” that should be welcomed not feared. Faced with such skeptics, Obama charged that “There are those who will suggest that moving toward clean energy will destroy our economy – when it’s the system we currently have that endangers our prosperity and prevents us from creating millions of new jobs. There are going to be those who cynically claim, make cynical claims that contradict the overwhelming scientific evidence when it comes to climate change, claims whose only purpose is to defeat or delay the change that we know is necessary.”

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