Obama unveils historic power grid reform

October 27 2009

US President Barack Obama speaks after touring the DeSoto Next Generation Solar Energy Center in Arcadia, Florida. Obama Tuesday announced the largest modernization of the US electricity grid in history, in a 3.4-billion-dollar bid to launch a new era of renewable energy consumption.

President Barack Obama Tuesday announced the largest modernization of the US electricity grid in history, in a 3.4-billion-dollar bid to launch a new era of renewable energy consumption.

The president toured the largest solar energy plant in the United States to unveil the program, under which 100 firms, manufacturers, utilities and cities were awarded grants worth from 400,000 to 200 million dollars.

The new plan will help build a nationwide "smart energy grid" to cut costs and improve reliability of the creaking system.

"We need to do more than just add solar megawatts to this electrical grid," Obama said, against a backdrop of rows and rows of solar panels sown like vines in the fields at the DeSoto solar [energy plant](#) in Arcadia, Florida.

"This grid... still runs on century-old technology. It wastes too much energy and costs us too much money and it's too susceptible to outages and blackouts."

Obama compared the current US electricity grid, plagued by breakdowns and outages to the national roads system built during the 1920s and 1930s.

Carol Browner, Obama's special assistant on energy and climate change predicted the program would have a "transformational impact on how electricity is generated, delivered, and consumed."

"We have a very antiquated system in this country. We need to upgrade that system, we need to modernize that system, and with it will come tremendous benefits for consumers and for our environment."

The grants keep a campaign promise from Obama's 2008 election campaign and are drawn from his 787-billion-dollar economic stimulus plan.

The program is in line with his vow to lead the global battle against bloated energy consumption and [climate change](#), and to build a "green economy" to produce a new generation of jobs in an environmental revolution.

Administration officials battling the worst economic crisis for decades said the project would create tens of thousands of jobs and lay the foundation for a new [green energy](#) infrastructure in the United States.

The administration touted an analysis by the Electric Power Research Institute that estimated that the use of smart grid technologies could cut electricity use by more than four percent by 2030, saving 20.4 billion dollars.

Officials also said that the investment in the smart energy grid would allow companies to better draw electricity generated by solar power in the western United States and wind power from midwestern states for instance.

"I would say this is much more than just a facelift," said Browner.

"This is about really making something function in a modern way so that consumers can have better choices."

The program will also fund the installation of millions of smart meters in homes and businesses, which will help consumers regulate their own energy use.

Administration officials argue the plan will put the United States on a path to generate 20 percent or more of its energy from renewable sources by 2020.

It will finance the installation of one million in-home displays, 170,000 smart thermostats and 175,000 load control devices to allow consumers to cut their energy use, the White House said.

Many of the projects are also supplemented by matching capital from private firms.

(c) 2009 AFP

Citation: Obama unveils historic power grid reform (2009, October 27) retrieved 10 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2009-10-obama-unveils-historic-power-grid.html