

Obama to promote energy ideas at Penn State

February 3 2011, By BEN FELLER , AP White House Correspondent

(AP) -- Promoting an overshadowed domestic agenda, President Barack Obama on Thursday will propose a new tax credit and other steps aimed at persuading the nation's businesses to make their buildings more energy-efficient.

Obama's announcement, to come during a visit to Penn State, is part of a White House effort to bolster the economic themes of his recent State of the Union address with specific proposals. His broader aim is to rally public support and congressional votes for a "clean energy" agenda that Obama says will cut costs and create jobs in the fields of the future.

The president's quick trip to State College, Pa., however, comes as the crisis in Egypt has dominated his time and consumed media attention. Obama is trying to press on with his economic ideas, ahead of the release of his budget plan on Feb. 14, while he manages his response to the violent clashes that have Egypt and the Mideast on the edge.

Obama is returning to a state he won in the 2008 election after losing the Democratic primary to Hillary Rodham Clinton, now his secretary of state. Pennsylvania is sure to figure prominently in his bid for re-election in 2012.

Rob Gleason, chairman of Pennsylvania's Republican party, said Obama's visit is a sign that the 2012 campaign is in full swing. In a Thursday morning conference call, Gleason questioned whether Obama's energy policy could be trusted and criticized what he called the administration's "runaway spending" and hostile position toward

industry.

The president is expected to tour some Penn State labs and speak to an invitation-only audience about his energy proposals. As part of his new plan, Obama will ask Congress to provide companies with a tax credit that financially rewards them for retrofitting their buildings in ways that decrease [energy usage](#). The proposal would alter the existing tax break for such commercial upgrades, switching it from a deduction to a credit that applies more widely, administration officials said.

The president is also now calling for:

- Broader access to financing for businesses that want to make energy-saving upgrades, and loan guarantees for hospitals, schools and companies to do the same.
- Competitive grants for states and local governments that make it easier for companies to upgrade their buildings.
- More training for workers in the field of commercial building technology.

And Obama plans to challenge CEOs and university presidents to commit to making their buildings more energy-efficient. Administration officials previewed elements of the president's initiative ahead of his morning travel to Pennsylvania.

Penn State is getting presidential attention as a leader in the field of energy technology. The university heads a consortium of universities, colleges and industries that are developing a high-tech research hub, based in Philadelphia, on how to make buildings more energy-efficient. That center is supported by \$129 million in federal money over the next five years.

It is the largest grant in Penn State's history. On campus, Obama will get a look at some of the energy-efficiency research under way before delivering his comments.

The White House said it is targeting the commercial sector because its buildings consume roughly 20 percent of all [energy](#) in the U.S. economy. Administration officials offered no details on how much Obama's plan would cost. They said those details will be released in the budget and the proposed elimination of oil industry subsidies would help cover the costs.

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