

Obama pushing for more clean energy choices for consumers

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President Barack Obama salutes as he walks off of Air Force One with his daughter Malia at Andrews Air Force Base in Md., Sunday, Aug. 23, 2015. The president is returning to Washington after he and his family spent more than two weeks vacationing on the Massachusetts island of Martha's Vineyard. (AP Photo/Susan Walsh)

Pushing back against fossil fuel interests, President Barack Obama is pressing to give ordinary Americans more power to choose what kind of

power they use.

The president, in a speech at a clean energy conference in Las Vegas on Monday night, planned to announce new executive actions and other efforts aimed at making it easier for homeowners and businesses to invest in green energy improvements that in the past may have been impractical or unaffordable.

The moves are designed to build on the clean power plant rules that the president announced earlier in the month to cut carbon dioxide emissions from coal-fired power plants by a third. They all feed into Obama's goal of cutting overall U.S. emissions by 26 percent to 28 percent over the next decade to combat climate change and encourage other countries to do likewise.

Monday's actions are focused on giving families and businesses more say in what types and how much power they rely on. That could mean rooftop solar panels, once largely the province of committed environmentalists, or other renewable energy innovations.

Housing Secretary Julian Castro said the plan "hits the sweet spot" by making clean energy more affordable for people and protecting the environment. He said people too often have been "riced out" of clean energy options.

Obama's speech, at an annual energy conference hosted by Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid, was aimed at countering fossil fuel and utility interests that have been working at the state level and elsewhere to undercut clean energy policies with arguments that the matter should be left to the free market.

The Heartland Institute, a conservative think tank that denies manmade climate change and gets money from the billionaire Koch brothers was

among groups co-sponsoring a simultaneous "affordable energy summit" in Las Vegas as a counterpoint to Reid's gathering. The organization, which previously received money from ExxonMobil, maintains that Obama's policies promote wind and solar power at the expense of conventional energy and "will inevitably cause skyrocketing electricity prices while providing little if any net environmental benefits," according to the summit's website.

Among the steps being announced by Obama:

—New guidance from the Federal Housing Administration that could dramatically expand the use of so-called PACE loans that allow homeowners to install energy improvements and pay back the costs over time. So far, use of Property-Assessed Clean Energy financing has been constrained by regulatory obstacles.

—Making \$1 billion in additional loan guarantees available from the Department of Energy to encourage innovation in technologies that give Americans more flexibility in choosing renewable energy options.

Obama also was announcing the approval of a transmission line to support a planned 485-megawatt solar plant planned for Riverside County in California. The Blythe Mesa plant is expected to produce enough renewable energy to power more than 145,000 homes.

The Wilderness Society's Chase Huntley called the project a good example "of how we can meet our clean energy goals with limited impact to wildlands and wildlife habitat."

While in Nevada, Obama also planned to attend an evening fundraiser benefiting the Nevada State Democratic Party.

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