Remarks at Clean Energy Policy Conference, Alexandria, Virginia

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Acting Secretary of Commerce Rebecca Blank
Remarks at Clean Energy Policy Conference, Alexandria, Virginia

Hello, and good morning everyone.

On behalf of the Obama administration, it's my pleasure to welcome all of you today.

I'd like to offer a special welcome to Connecticut Governor Dan Malloy, who will be speaking shortly.

I'd also like to recognize the hosts for this conference: the Commerce Department's U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and Economic Development Agency, The Brookings Institution and the Clean Energy Group.

And last, I'd like to thank this prestigious assembly of policy and industry experts on clean energy for lending your expertise to this meeting.

No pressure, but we're expecting some viable proposals for more effectively developing and supporting innovative clean energy industries by the end of the day.

Why the hurry?

Because as President Obama said when he released his *Blueprint for a Secure Energy Future in March*, ". . . the countries that lead the 21st century clean energy economy will be the countries that lead the 21st century global economy."

We want America to be that nation. We want America to win the future.

As we recover from this recession, the transition to clean energy has the potential to create economic growth and millions of jobs – but we need to accelerate that transition … we need to seize the moment.

The president's three-point strategy for a clean energy economy calls for:

- Developing and securing America's Energy Supplies;
- Providing consumers with choices to reduce costs and save energy; and

- Innovating our way to a clean energy future.

It builds on the progress the administration has made over the past two years.

Early in his presidency, President Obama called on the United States to double its production of renewable energy by 2012–to enhance U.S. national security and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but also to help foster job growth in the fast-growing clean energy sector.

The president's Recovery Act included more than $90 billion in clean energy investment–the single largest clean energy investment in American history.

This funding supported programs that created over 224,000 American jobs and tens of thousands of domestic renewable energy technology projects.

We cast a wide net–promoting everything from advanced wind turbines and solar panels to new battery technologies and the modernization of our electricity grid.

These clean energy investments have put the U.S. on track to reach the president's goal and double clean energy generation from 2008 levels by next year, creating enormous benefits for public health and the environment.

Additionally, working with the automotive industry, we set tough new fuel economy standards for model 2012-2016 vehicles that will save 1.8 billion barrels of oil.

And recently, we proposed the first-ever fuel efficiency standards for heavy-duty trucks.

Achieving our energy efficiency targets will generate demand for innovative technologies that will spur economic growth and create quality jobs in cutting edge industries across America.

This, simply, is the top priority for President Obama and this administration.

It's not without risk, of course. When it comes to investing in some of the most innovative companies in the world, there will *always* be an element of risk. In a fast-evolving and incredibly competitive industry, no one should expect we're going to bat a thousand. But the alternative, ceding the industry–and the jobs that come with it–to the rest of the world, would be unforgivable. This administration will maintain its commitment to expanding the production of renewable energies, and we have no intention of slowing down any time soon.

But it's difficult for clean energy businesses to thrive–it's difficult for any business to thrive–if they're worried about whether or not there are going to be enough consumers who want to buy their products and services.

That is why earlier this month President Obama released his American Jobs Act.

This plan, which we hope Congress passes without delay, would provide a significant new tax cut for small businesses–and that describes the vast majority of firms in the clean energy sector.

It will cut the payroll tax in half on the first $5 million of wages paid by a company. And it provides a 100 percent payroll tax holiday on any new hiring or increased wages paid to existing employees. This gives incentives, particularly to small businesses, to innovate, to hire new workers, and to grow.

Additionally, the Jobs Act extends the 100 percent expensing for capital expenditures into 2012, continuing an historic incentive for new capital investments.

The legislation would also empower states with new flexibility to allow out-of-work Americans to continue receiving unemployment benefits while they apprentice or take internships that will help them get the on-the-job training they need to learn the skills green-tech industries are looking for.

Importantly, the payroll tax cut proposed by the president would put more money in the pockets of American consumers, by also reducing payroll taxes paid by workers. The average American family will have $1,500 to spend under the president's plan that would otherwise be paid in taxes. This will spur consumer spending and give businesses more certainty about stronger demand.

We believe these measures and others in the Jobs Act, including the president's proposal to modernize America's schools and retrofit them with energy efficiency upgrades, can help a private sector in need of a little boost and put more people to work–and we eagerly await their passage through Congress.

But at the same time we're focused on getting more Americans back on the job in the near term, we're also looking to rebuild America's economic foundation and create the conditions for long-term economic growth.

Clean energy is a big part of that.

At Commerce, we continue to aggressively support entrepreneurs all across America who are developing clean energy and energy-efficiency technologies.

First, the largest potential markets for clean energy technologies lie outside the U.S. Global investment in clean energy totaled over $240 billion in 2010.

We want innovative U.S. companies to be at the forefront of delivering green products and services.

To that end, we've launched the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Export Initiative, with an online exporters guide and website, export.gov/REEE, to help green energy companies find new global markets.

As part of this initiative, we're co-chairing with the Department of Energy, a multi-agency effort aimed at addressing the major export barriers facing U.S. renewable energy and energy efficiency businesses.

For example, because financing can be a significant obstacle, the Export-Import Bank, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, and the U.S. Trade and Development Agency have teamed up to produce new financing products specific to this sector.

The export program also fits squarely into Commerce's leadership role in implementing President Obama's National Export Initiative. The NEI was announced in 2010 and aims to double U.S. exports by 2015, in support of millions of American jobs.

Second, America gets about one-fifth of its electricity from nuclear energy. At Commerce, we're supporting the U.S. nuclear industry's endeavors to rebuild its manufacturing base. We're also working with them to identify the industry's most pressing trade challenges and coordinating efforts to address them.

Third, in 2010, we obligated $26.9 million through the Global Climate Change Mitigation Incentive Fund to support renewable energy, energy efficiency and other projects that help advance the green economy, such as regional economic clusters.

Fourth, through our Green Technology Pilot Program, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office has accelerated hundreds of patent applications for green inventions. Earlier patenting of these technologies can help inventors secure funding, create new businesses and the jobs that come with them, and bring vital green technologies to market much sooner.

And finally, our country's way of life depends on an efficient electric power distribution system. Developing a smart grid is a top priority of this administration.

Working with the private sector, Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) is developing standards for a 21st century smart grid that incorporates advanced technologies to achieve unprecedented efficiency, reliability and safety.

These standards facilitate useful interactions so that, for example, "smart" appliances and "smart meters" will tell consumers how much power they are using and at what cost.

These standards will also encourage the development of the infrastructure that will enable the widespread use of plug-in electric vehicles and increase the deployment of clean energy to power homes and businesses.

After consultation with some 600 organizations, NIST identified requirements for smart grid interoperability and security and rolled out Version 1.0 of the Interoperability Framework. And Version 2.0 is on its way.

I'll close with this. Energy policy is a central and complex subject–the one issue that affects virtually every other, from our economy to our environment to our security.

Today China and Germany both invest more in clean energy than we do, even though we are a larger economy and a substantially larger user of energy.

Leading the world in clean energy is critical to strengthening the American economy and improving national security. We must produce the next generation of technologies.

We have the workers and the will to ensure that happens.

As President Obama said, we boast one critical, renewable resource that the rest of the world cannot match: American ingenuity. American know-how.

We just need to put it to work.

The alternative is to cede that ground to another country, to let someone else lead, to hope for the best while other nations make national commitments to inventing the energy sources and energy technologies of the future.

That's not the attitude that made America great. That's not a posture this administration accepts.

As a country, we cannot compete to place.

We must compete to win.

Thank you.