

Obama, GOP Vie for Upper Hand on Energy

KEN THOMAS, Associated Press

MALJAMAR, N.M. (AP) — Wooing a nation of increasingly angry motorists, President Barack Obama and his Republican rivals are all plunging into gas-pump politics, seeking the upper hand as energy becomes a driving issue in the election campaign.

The president is defending his energy agenda this week, traveling Wednesday to a solar panel plant in Nevada and oil and gas fields in New Mexico and the site of a future oil pipeline in Oklahoma that the White House is promising to accelerate. At the same time, GOP opponents from front-runner Mitt Romney on down are vigorously accusing him of stifling domestic production and betting on foolhardy alternative energy methods over traditional oil drilling.



With gasoline reaching \$3.86 a gallon in the U.S. and apparently heading higher, the public is impatient for Obama — or someone in his place — to do something about it.

In truth, a president has little direct control over gas prices, which have risen more than 50 cents a gallon since January in response to a standoff over Iran's nuclear program that has threatened to disrupt Middle East oil supplies.

Obama, GOP Vie for Upper Hand on Energy

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)



Well aware of Republicans' criticism, Obama's advisers argue that voters take a sophisticated view toward energy and think about it as a problem demanding long-term answers. They know that talk about future solutions may not satisfy people as they endure high prices, but they're betting that voters will side with the candidate they trust the most to deal with the issue — and they're determined that that will be Obama.

"We're drilling all over the place," Obama said in Maljamar, N.M., in a field dotted with oil rigs.

Obama, GOP Vie for Upper Hand on Energy

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)



Polls show less certainty about it all. One survey this month by CBS News and The New York Times found that 54 percent of Americans felt the price of gasoline was something a president could do a lot about while 36 percent said it was beyond his control. And a recent Washington Post/ABC poll found 50 percent thought the Obama administration could reasonably do something to bring down gas prices, while 45 percent felt the recent rapid rise has been beyond White House control.

Obama has repeatedly argued that drilling for new oil alone will not solve the nation's energy woes or reduce gas prices. He accuses Republicans of claiming they can "wave a magic wand" to return to the days of cheap gas, and on Wednesday, he mocked them for having a "lack of imagination" about alternative energy.

Obama, GOP Vie for Upper Hand on Energy

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)



"You'd think that everybody would be supportive of solar power," Obama said from the Copper Mountain Solar 1 facility in Nevada, the largest plant of its kind in the country, with nearly 1 million solar panels. "And yet if some politicians had their way, there won't be any more public investment in solar energy. There won't be as many new jobs."

Obama carried three of the four states on this week's itinerary — Oklahoma is one of the safest Republican states in the nation — but all four elected Republican governors in 2010. Two of the governors, Brian Sandoval of Nevada and Susana Martinez of New Mexico, have been floated as potential vice presidential choices this year. Obama was making his first visit to Oklahoma as president

Obama, GOP Vie for Upper Hand on Energy

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)



He has been hurt by his administration's decision to pump millions into California solar company Solyndra before it collapsed. And he's been repeatedly criticized by Republican presidential candidates for blocking the 1,700-mile Keystone XL pipeline, which would carry tar sands oil from western Canada to refineries along the Texas Gulf Coast.

The mere mention of Solyndra and Keystone generate instant reactions at Republican rallies.

Romney has blamed Obama for rising gasoline prices and urged the president to fire Energy Secretary Steven Chu, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson, calling them the "gas hike trio."

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich has adopted \$2.50 gasoline as a central tenet of his struggling campaign, criticizing Obama for holding up the pipeline project and mocking him as "President Algae" for highlighting research into developing oil and gas from algae.

Former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum, meanwhile, regularly notes his grandfather's work as a coal miner. And he detoured his campaign to tour oil fields in North Dakota recently, labeling himself the only ardent supporter of oil drilling.

"Instead of paying two-digit dollars you're now paying three digits," Santorum said in Illinois. "When you see that zero come up, when it gets into the \$100 range, when

Obama, GOP Vie for Upper Hand on Energy

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

you see that zero, think of 'O' for Obama because that's why you're paying that extra amount of money."

On Wednesday, Santorum campaigned at a company in Harvey, La., that services oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico. He pressed the administration to open more federal lands for leases that he says would both generate revenue for the government and boost U.S. oil production.

"Here's an opportunity for us in this country to do something about it: increasing jobs, lowering energy prices, decreasing the deficit, all of the things you would think the president of the United States would be for," Santorum said.

In many ways, the issue has come full circle for the president. In 2008, candidate Obama criticized an inside-the-Beltway culture for the rise in gasoline prices. "So what have we got for all that experience? Gas that's approaching \$4 a gallon. Because you can fight all you want inside of Washington, but unless you change the way it works you won't be able to make the changes America needs," Obama said at an Indianapolis gas station in April 2008.

Now he's the president.

From the sprawling solar plant in Nevada, Obama's motorcade kicked up dust as it traveled into an oil field in New Mexico, where he promoted increased drilling on federal lands.

On Thursday, Obama will use Cushing, Okla., as a backdrop to highlight the decision by Calgary-based TransCanada to build a portion of the Keystone pipeline from Oklahoma to Texas. The 485-mile line from Cushing to Port Arthur, Texas, doesn't require presidential approval because the pipeline does not cross a U.S. border.

The White House announced Wednesday that Obama plans to fast-track the pipeline.

Administration officials have said the Oklahoma-to-Texas line could address an oil bottleneck at a Cushing storage hub, but the argument may not fly in Oklahoma, where President George W. Bush and Sen. John McCain carried all 77 counties in the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections.

"It's a PR stunt and Oklahomans aren't buying it — the president is celebrating his failed energy policies in a community that will be hardest hit by them," said Rep. John Sullivan, R-Okla.

Obama wraps up his trip with a stop in Ohio, a key state in November, where he will discuss advanced energy research and development at Ohio State University.

Obama has few options to dramatically alter gas prices. Beyond green-lighting Keystone or opening up more oil drilling in Alaska or in the Gulf of Mexico, Justice Department officials could accelerate efforts to crack down on speculation in the oil markets, a move that the administration has discussed.

Obama, GOP Vie for Upper Hand on Energy

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

The White House could also tap the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, something it has said it would do only along with action by other countries. The U.S. released oil from its reserve last summer but saw little impact. Oil prices dropped nearly 5 percent when the government announced the release of 30 million barrels from the SPR on July 23, but prices quickly rebounded and oil ended the year higher than it started.

"Is there a lot that can be done in the short term that can have a huge impact? The answer to that is no," said William Galston, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institute and a former domestic policy adviser to President Bill Clinton. Yet he cautioned, "I don't think a posture of simply saying that and being the voice of responsibility in a rising political clamor is going to serve the White House politically well."

Republicans are trying to make sure of that. Ahead of the president's trip, the Republican-leaning super PAC Crossroads GPS was spending \$650,000 on TV ads in Las Vegas, Albuquerque, N.M., and Columbus, Ohio, criticizing Obama's handling of energy policy and the Keystone XL pipeline.

Associated Press writers Jennifer Agiesta, Kasie Hunt, Steve Peoples, Brian Bakst and Jim Kuhnhenn contributed to this report.

Follow Ken Thomas on Twitter: http://www.twitter.com/AP_Ken_Thomas [1]

Source URL (retrieved on 08/21/2014 - 7:28am):

<http://www.chem.info/news/2012/03/obama-gop-vie-upper-hand-energy>

Links:

[1] http://www.twitter.com/AP_Ken_Thomas