Obama ad accuses Romney of backing Big Oil

ANDREW MIGA - Associated Press - Associated Press

TITLE: "Remember"

LENGTH: 30 seconds

AIRING: Cable and broadcast stations in Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Nevada, Ohio and Virginia.

KEY IMAGES: This ad from President Barack Obama's re-election campaign features a narrator saying that under Obama domestic oil production is at an 8-year high. "So why is Big Oil attacking him?" asks the narrator. Obama's face fills a TV screen behind the words "Big Oil Attack Ad." The narrator goes on to say, "Because he's fighting to end their tax breaks."

The narrator credits Obama with raising auto mileage standards and doubling renewable energy, before taking aim at likely Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney: "In all these fights, Mitt Romney's stood with Big Oil — for their tax breaks, attacking higher mileage standards and renewables."

Obama's face appears on a TV screen. "So when you see this ad, remember who paid for it and what they want," says the narrator as the words "Big Oil" fill the TV screen.

ANALYSIS: The ad signals a major strategic shift for the Obama campaign because it directly attacks Romney, who has tightened his grip on the GOP presidential nomination in recent weeks, by name for the first time. It is airing in states expected to be competitive in the general election. Obama is now treating the former Massachusetts governor as though he's already the Republican nominee.

Obama's ad is also a response to a recent $3.6 million ad buy by an outside group assailing Obama's energy record, blaming him for rising gas prices and his decision to delay the Keystone XL pipeline project. Gas prices promise to be a major campaign issue, and Republicans want to tap into voter frustration by blaming Obama for policies they claim are restricting U.S. oil production and pushing up energy costs.

The anti-Obama ads aired in eight states by the American Energy Alliance aim to undercut Obama's message that he has increased oil drilling and pushed to develop renewable energy sources. The alliance's ad came as Obama unsuccessfully pressured Congress to cut billions of dollars in subsidies for oil companies.

Obama's ad accuses Romney of being a pawn for Big Oil. Obama wants to frame the election as a referendum on the economic security of middle-class voters, so rising energy prices, particularly gasoline, are front and center.

There's no way of knowing if Obama's claim that the American Energy Alliance ad is funded by Big Oil is true; the alliance does not disclose its donors or contribution amounts. However, its arguments attacking Obama are the same ones made by oil companies and their allies. The alliance's president is Thomas Pyle, a former lobbyist for Koch Industries, which has oil interests. Its top executives, Charles and David Koch, have been prominent supporters of conservative and libertarian causes.

Obama's ad cited government statistics to back its claim that domestic oil production is at an 8-year high. The U.S. produced more oil in 2010 than it has since 2003, and all forms of energy production have increased.

Obama wants to take credit for the trend, but he oversells the government's influence and ignores the fact that many wells coming into production were planned years ago, before he was president.

Obama has successfully ushered in historic increases in fuel economy standards for automobiles, as the ad claims. He also has invested heavily in cleaner forms of energy. The U.S. produces more energy from alternative sources such as wind, solar and biofuels now than it has at any point in history.

Romney has, as the ad claims, criticized Obama's support for renewables. "You can't drive a car with a windmill on it," Romney told a campaign crowd in Ohio. Romney does not support government clean energy loan programs that pick winners and losers. He says market forces should do that.

Romney too has blamed the rising cost of gasoline on Obama's decisions to limit oil drilling in environmentally sensitive areas. However, U.S. oil production is unrelated to gasoline prices because oil is a global commodity and factors that influence gasoline prices are generally beyond the control of a president or a nation.

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