

# Romney says US energy independence is achievable

JULIE PACE - Associated Press - Associated Press

Seeking to reset his economic message, Republican Mitt Romney pledged Thursday to create 3 million jobs and more than \$1 trillion in revenue by ramping up offshore oil drilling and giving states more control over energy production on federal land.

Romney, reviving a long-elusive goal pushed by presidents and presidential candidates for decades, said his plans would make the U.S., along with Canada and Mexico, energy independent by 2020.

"This is not some pie in the sky kind of thing," Romney told voters in Hobbs, the heart of New Mexico's oil and gas industry. "This is a real achievable objective."

The cornerstone of Romney's plan is opening up more areas for offshore oil drilling, including in the mid-Atlantic, where it is currently banned. He also wants to give states the power to establish all forms of energy production on federal lands, a significant shift in current policy that could face strong opposition in Congress.

His proposals make little mention of renewable sources of energy, like wind and solar, backed by President Barack Obama. Romney has deep ties to big oil and raised more than \$7 million from industry executives during a campaign fundraiser in Texas earlier this week.

The presumptive Republican nominee's attempts to refocus on his plans for job creation follows a week dominated by comments made by Missouri Republican Rep. Todd Akin, a Senate candidate who said a woman's body is able to avoid pregnancy during what he called a "legitimate rape."

Romney called for Akin to drop out of the Senate race, but the congressman so far has refused.

Obama's campaign also began a new push on the economy Thursday with a television advertisement featuring former President Bill Clinton. In the ad, Clinton speaks directly to the camera and says voters face a "clear choice" over which candidate will return the nation to full employment.

"We need to keep going with his plan," Clinton says of Obama in the ad, which will run in eight battleground states.

The former president also draws a connection between Obama's policies for strengthening the middle class and the nation's economic prosperity during his time in office, when the U.S. economy was thriving. Obama's campaign has been seeking to use Clinton as a reminder to voters that the economy was strong the last time a

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Democrat held the White House.

Romney said his energy proposals would result in more than \$1 trillion in revenue for federal, state and local governments, plus millions of jobs.

His calls for increased drilling include opening up coastline in the Mid-Atlantic where drilling is currently banned. His proposals for giving states the power to establish all forms of energy production on federal lands would also be a significant shift in current policy that could face strong opposition in Congress.

In a supporting document, Romney says it now takes up to 307 days to receive permits to drill a well on federal land. By contrast, states such as North Dakota issue permits within 10 days and Colorado within 27 days, Romney said.

"States are far better able to develop, adopt and enforce regulations based on their unique resources, geology and local concerns," the statement said.

In an effort to appease environmentalists, Romney says he would prevent energy production on federal lands designated as off-limits.

Romney's plan focuses heavily on boosting domestic oil production, including approving the Keystone XL pipeline that would run from Canada to U.S. refineries in Texas.

The proposal would establish a new five-year leasing plan for offshore oil production that "aggressively opens" new areas for drilling, starting with the coasts of Virginia and North Carolina. Virginia's Republican Gov. Bob McDonnell has pushed to expand offshore drilling as a boost to Virginia's economy.

The Obama administration has proposed a plan that would allow energy companies to begin seismic testing to find oil and natural reserves in the Atlantic Ocean. Companies would use the information to determine where to apply for energy leases, although no leases would be available until at least 2017.

The Romney plan makes little mention of wind energy, which Obama has pushed heavily in states such as Iowa and Colorado. Obama has pushed Congress to extend a tax credit for producers of wind energy, an approach that Romney opposes.

Romney accused Obama of seeking to block oil and gas production in order to help renewable energy companies prosper.

"I like wind and solar like the next person, but I don't want the law to be used to stop the production of oil and gas and coal," Romney said.

Obama campaign spokeswoman Lis Smith called Romney's energy plan "backward."

"This isn't a recipe for energy independence," Smith said. "It's just another irresponsible scheme to help line the pockets of big oil while allowing the U.S to fall behind and cede the clean energy sector to China."

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The president told donors in New York Wednesday night that under his administration, dependence on foreign oil has gone below 50 percent for the first time in 13 years.

"Oil production is up. Natural gas is up. But we're also doubling the energy that we get from wind and solar. That is clean, it's renewable, it's homegrown, it's creating jobs all across America," Obama said.

Obama has called for a one-third reduction in U.S. oil imports by 2025. The president's proposal for boosting domestic oil production relies in part on offering incentives to companies that hold leases for offshore and onshore drilling to speed up recovery; increasing the use of biofuels and natural gas; and making vehicles more energy-efficient.

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Daly reported from Washington.

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