NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

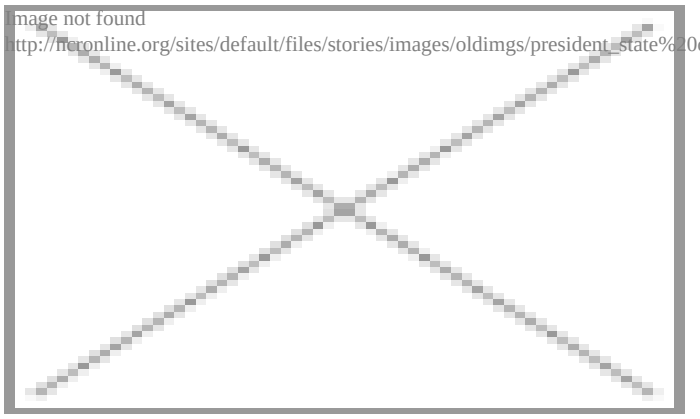
Obama addresses 'all-of-the-above' American energy

Brian Roewe | Jan. 25, 2012 Eco Catholic

In last night?s State of the Union address, President Barack Obama dedicated around six and a half minutes of his 65-minute speech to energy and environmental issues. (You can view the entire speech [1] here; the energy discussion begins at the 27:25 mark. Here's a transcript [2], as well.)

The president covered a wide spectrum ? from oil to alternatives ? of proposals likely to both encourage and irritate fossil fuel supporters and clean energy advocates alike.

Brian Merchant of Treehugger.com [3] noted the approach of using all types of energy sources was homage to ?the GOP?s long-standing talking point about needing an ?all of the above? approach to energy.?



Obama began with the fossil fuels, announcing a plan to open 75 percent of potential offshore oil and gas reserves. On oil specifically, he made no mention of the Keystone XL pipeline [4] but stated that American oil production has increased to its highest levels in eight years, while dependence on foreign imports has dropped significantly, to its lowest point in 16 years.

The theme of American energy indepen- dence rang through the address, as the president discussed the country?s natural gas supply, which he stated could last the country for through the next century. At the same time he proposed developing the extraction of natural gas, he stressed the need for safety in the process ? likely a reference to the recent Ohio earthquakes likely related to fracking [5].

But he spent the bulk of the energy section of his speech on clean energy, touting America?s position as world leaders in high-tech battery manufacturing and the nation?s doubling of renewable energy use (though a reference point for the doubling wasn?t provided).

In looking forward, Obama outlined a plan that he acknowledged won?t necessarily yield immediate dividends, but must remain a priority.

?Some technologies don?t pan out; some companies fail. But I will not walk away from the promise of clean energy,? he stated.

One of his biggest proposals would put an end to subsidies for oil companies and shift those credits to the clean energy industry, a declaration well-received among environmentalists.

?It?s time to end the taxpayer giveaways to an [oil] industry that rarely has been more profitable, and double-down on a clean energy industry that never has been more promising,? the president said.

Likely disappointing to climate change advocates [6], though, Obama did not take a hard position on acting on the pressing issue, conceding that too much division on the topic still exists in Congress. Instead, he redirected the speech to rebuking political leaders for their lack of action in setting a clean energy standard, and stated he would take it upon himself to do so.

?I?m directing my administration to allow the development of clean energy on enough public land to power 3 million homes,? he said. ?And I?m proud to announce that the Department of Defense, working with us, the world?s largest consumer of energy, will make one of the largest commitments to clean energy in history ? with the Navy purchasing enough capacity to power a quarter of a million homes a year.?

He concluded his energy section on using less energy, calling for a bill to provide incentives for manufacturers to upgrade their facilities to reduce energy use and pollution, while increasing jobs and manufacturing.

Overall, the early response among ecologists and environmentalists seemed mixed. They praised the president?s statement that ?the easiest way to save money is to waste less energy,? while begrudged the further commitment to fossil fuels and his perceived sidestep of the whole climate change issue altogether [7].

As for the fate of these proposals, that?s up in the air, as are any proposals from political leaders and candidates. But if substantial progress is to occur on the grounds of the climate and the environment in the United States, Congress and government officials will have to first adopt more efficient energy practices for themselves.

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