

# Obama awards \$2.3 billion clean energy tax credits

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By Alister Bull

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. President Barack Obama unveiled a \$2.3 billion tax credit on Friday to boost jobs by promoting clean energy, as new data showed the country's unemployment rate remained stuck in the double digits.

Obama said the credit, from funds earmarked under a \$787 billion stimulus package he signed last February, would create 17,000 U.S. jobs and be matched by an additional \$5 billion in private capital.

"Building a robust clean energy sector is how we will create the jobs of the future, jobs that pay well and can't be outsourced," Obama said.

"This initiative is good for middle-class families. It is good for our security. It is good for our planet," he said.

High unemployment is one of Obama's most pressing domestic challenges and a monthly payroll report released on Friday served as a reminder labor market conditions remain grim. U.S. unemployment was unchanged at 10 percent in December, while businesses unexpectedly shed 85,000 jobs.

"The jobs numbers that were released by the Labor Department this morning are a reminder that the road to recovery is never straight," Obama said.

Climate change, alongside healthcare and financial regulation reform, is a core goal of Obama's White House.

All require support from Congress, where his Democratic Party may suffer a setback in November congressional elections unless he can start to push the jobless figures down.

The tax credits have been granted to 183 projects across the country involved in technologies that include solar, wind and other initiatives to improve energy efficiency.

On top of the employment resulting directly from the tax credit, Obama said it would lead to "tens of thousands" of additional new jobs.

The White House says the stimulus money has helped prevent the deepest U.S. recession in 70 years from getting much worse, and has renewed its push to boost job creation, which many analysts say warrants more public spending.

Obama held a jobs summit and met with bankers last month to boost lending to small businesses in the hope that would encourage them to hire more workers.

In addition, the House of Representatives has approved an additional \$155 billion jobs package to boost hiring, although the Senate has yet to take up its version of the legislation and will first tackle Obama's signature healthcare reforms.

"We have to continue to explore every avenue to accelerate the return to hiring," he said.

Companies that will benefit from the clean energy tax credit include Itron Inc, based in Liberty Lake, Washington, PPG Industries, Inc, based in Pittsburgh, and TPI Composites, Inc, based in Scottsdale, Arizona.

(Reporting by Alister Bull; Editing by Peter Cooney)



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