Obama Says Indiana 'Factories Coming Back To Life'

Ben Feller, Associated Press Writer

WAKARUSA, Indiana (AP) — Trumpeting a "made in America" message, President Barack Obama on Wednesday unveiled a national investment in electric cars as the latest effort to rebuild an economy that keeps shedding jobs.

"We know that, even in the hardest times, against the toughest odds, we have never surrendered. We don't give up," Obama told employees on the steamy factory floor of an RV maker in northern Indiana, a Midwestern region suffering from one of the worst unemployment surges in the nation.

"We don't surrender our fates to chance. We have always endured. We have worked hard, and we have fought for our future."

Obama's comments mixed a pep talk with a defense of his economic agenda. In the heart of small-community America, he relied heavily on a pro-America spirit.

"I'm committed to a strategy that ensures that America leads," said Obama, promoting a $2.4 billion program of grants to build up electric-car manufacturing, from batteries to motors.

Venturing back to a region reeling from deep unemployment, Obama's latest mission in Indiana is to show that the costly stimulus plan he lobbied for is producing tangible help — in the form of tens of thousands of jobs.

He spoke near the border region of Michigan and Indiana, the two states that will benefit the most from the grants. The money is part of a $787 billion stimulus program approved by Congress at Obama's urging — one he defended Wednesday amid criticism the plan has been slow to kick in.

For his backdrop, he chose Monaco RV, purchased in June by Navistar International Corp. after its previous owner went bankrupt because of the collapse in the recreational vehicle industry. Indiana's Elkhart-Goshen area had an unemployment rate of 16.8 percent in June. That's up 10 percentage points from last year.

In an interview, Obama said it was fair for his presidency's economic performance to be judged on Elkhart's.

"Our whole goal is to first of all rescue the economy from the brink," he told MSNBC television. "But the most important thing we're going to have to do is help Elkhart reinvent itself."

The grants Obama announced Wednesday will be split among nearly 50 projects in

25 states, with the biggest shares going to Indiana and Michigan to create job opportunities in the automotive industry.

Grant recipients include Johnson Controls Inc., of Milwaukee, $299 million to build battery packs and cells for hybrid vehicles at a facility in Holland, Michigan.; General Motors Co., $241 million to produce battery packs and the develop electric drive vehicles in Michigan and Maryland; and Ford Motor Co., $92.7 million for electric drive components at plants in Michigan and Missouri.

As Obama tries to convince Americans that his economic policy is working, at stake is the kind of public support that could influence his success on related matters, such as health care legislation, as Republican criticism mounts and public skepticism of the stimulus looms.

Signs of economic recovery have started to emerge in key areas such as housing and manufacturing. But jobs are the key to success — for individuals, for families, for politicians — and those have not begun returning yet.

Overall, U.S. unemployment hit 9.5 percent in June, the highest level in 26 years.

New monthly numbers come out Friday, and the White House has been trying for weeks to set expectations that joblessness will worsen before it gets better.

The American public is still uneasy. A total of 79 percent of people describe the economy as "poor," according to an AP-GfK Poll.

And Obama's approval rating on the economy is now at 50 percent, the same poll found, down from 58 percent in April.

Source URL (retrieved on *12/24/2014 - 9:45pm*):
http://www.impomag.com/news/2009/08/obama-says-indiana-factories-coming-back-life?qt-recent_content=1