

Report: U.S. Unlikely To Meet Congressional Biofuel Goals

Philip Elliott, The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A presidential task force recommended spending more money to make biofuels like ethanol, saying the U.S. is likely to fall short of mandates for more environmentally friendly energy.

An energy task force was ready to present President Barack Obama with a report outlining how the United States' production of fuel from plants or animals was unlikely to meet the goal Congress has demanded. The current production of 12 billion gallons annually is hardly the 36 billion lawmakers mandated by 2022.

The group planned to recommend expedited aid to the biofuel industry with a combination of federal dollars and private-sector investments.

Obama remains committed to meeting Congress' goal — which also includes a benchmark of 100 million gallons (378 million litres) of biofuel from wood chips or sugarcane this year — but recognizes it is unlikely without significant new measures, an administration official said, speaking condition of anonymity to discuss the president's thinking ahead of a meeting with governors and his advisers.

The task force — led by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, Energy Secretary Steven Chu and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson — recommended the government make certain that fuels produced with U.S. backing be compatible with the current fleet of cars on the road and that agencies recognize their limits. Otherwise, the efforts would be a waste of time, research and tax dollars, the task force said.

Wednesday's report was a first step in Obama's push to use the U.S. energy industry as a source for creating much-needed jobs.

Obama planned to discuss the recommendations in a meeting with governors from coal-producing states, hoping to earn their support for a languishing energy bill and bolster his image as a leader willing to work with Republicans as well as Democrats.

Obama was announcing new steps Wednesday to increase the role of biofuels in powering the nation and was releasing a report detailing how Washington could boost investment in green technologies, the administration official said. The president was also expected to discuss so-called clean coal technologies, the administration official said.

Many pieces of those proposals are likely to win Republican support on Capitol Hill, where GOP allies have been elusive for a Democratic White House looking to pass

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controversial cap-and-trade legislation that would limit the nation's emissions. Wednesday's plan also was likely to find support from Republican governors in states rich in coal and corn, which can be used to produce ethanol.

Republican Govs. Jim Douglas of Vermont — the chairman of the National Governors Association — Bob Riley of Alabama and Mike Rounds of South Dakota were scheduled to meet with Obama and Vice-President Joe Biden at the White House. The White House said Democratic governors from Wyoming, the nation's top coal-producing state, and neighbouring Montana, home to vast coal reserves, were also expected to attend with six other Democratic governors.

Energy has served as a major plank of the president's domestic agenda, finding places on his travel schedule, in his speeches and in his budget proposal released on Monday. In that plan, Obama's team called for tangible accomplishments that Democrats can champion as they head into a 2010 campaign season that has become more perilous since Republican Scott Brown won a special election to replace the late Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, a Democrat.

Officials said their recommendations would build on some \$786 million allocated for environmental projects ranging from ethanol research to pilot programs at biorefineries. The plans also would mesh with Obama's budget proposal, which called for ending oil and gas subsidies, a move that could save \$36.5 billion over a decade.

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