# Obama Shows Off Economic Successes, Friendship With GE

Jim Kuhnhenn, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama wants to cast some light on economic success stories in the shadows of a slow recovery. And he is looking to find some more.

On Friday, the president travels to Schenectady, N.Y., birthplace of the General Electric Co., to showcase a new GE deal with India and announce a restructured presidential advisory board to focus on increasing employment and competitiveness.

Obama is naming GE CEO Jeffrey Immelt as the head of a Council on Jobs and Competitiveness. The panel replaces Obama's Economic Recovery Advisory Board, which had been chaired by former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker. Obama announced late Thursday that Volcker, as expected, was ending his tenure on the panel.

Obama, in a statement after midnight, said the council's mission will be to help generate ideas from the private sector to speed up economic growth and promote American competitiveness.

"We still have a long way to go, and my number one priority is to ensure we are doing everything we can to get the American people back to work," the president said.

A new Associated Press-GfK poll shows a public skeptical of Obama's economic policies. More than half of those surveyed disapprove of how he's handled the economy, and just 35 percent say it has improved on his watch. However, three-quarters do say it's unrealistic to expect noticeable improvements after two years; they say it will take longer.

For Obama, the visit to upstate New York is also an opportunity to claim credit for tax, trade and energy policies pursued by his administration as the nation attempts to recover from the worst recession since the 1930s. It's the first of many treks during the second half of his term that the president is expected to take to put a more hopeful countenance on the economy amid stubbornly high unemployment.

The GE plant is benefiting from a power turbine contract with India announced during Obama's Southeast Asia trip in November. Immelt also has been an advocate of alternative forms of energy, and the GE facility, the company's largest energy plant, is the future site of GE's advanced battery manufacturing program. New battery technology has become something of an Obama pet project as a symbol of innovation, clean energy and job creation.

"This is a company that has brought jobs from overseas back into the United States," Obama spokesman Robert Gibbs said.

The White House said GE completed a $755 million agreement with India's Reliance Power Ltd. to supply gas and steam turbines for a power plant expansion in India. The deal will allow for about $500 million in exports from the United States, the White House said, and help support 1,200 manufacturing and 400 engineering jobs in the Schenectady plant.

Obama also plans to take note of GE employees as examples of middle class Americans who are benefiting from the payroll tax cut he negotiated with Republicans in a December economics package that retained Bush-era tax rates for all taxpayers. And he is expected to make a pitch for new business incentives and renewable energy tax credits contained in that compromise deal. GE and GE customers would benefit from those provisions.

In Immelt, Obama has a useful corporate ally. As chief executive of a multinational company, Immelt was one of 20 CEOs who met with the president during a daylong summit at Blair House last month. He was one of 14 U.S. business leaders invited to meet with Chinese President Hu Jintao this week at the White House and was among the guests for the lavish state dinner that followed.

In an opinion piece Friday in the Washington Post, Immelt said the restructured council under his leadership would focus on manufacturing and exports, trade and innovation.

"The president and I are committed to a candid and full dialogue among business, labor and government to help ensure that the United States has the most competitive and innovative economy in the world," he wrote.

His appointment adds another corporate insider to the White House orbit, underscoring the administration's efforts to build stronger ties to the business community. Earlier this month, Obama named former Commerce secretary and JPMorgan Chase executive William Daley as chief of staff.

The change also signals Obama's intention to shift from policies that were designed to stabilize the economy after the 2008 financial meltdown to a renewed focus on increasing employment, a vexing task that could affect his re-election efforts. The White House says the board's mission will be to help generate ideas from the private sector to speed up economic growth and promote American competitiveness.

The advisory board has included past government officials and representatives from labor and the corporate community. Volcker has been a regular White House adviser, though the board itself has met infrequently with the president.

Immelt has been supportive of Obama since the start of his presidency, though his political contributions tend to be bipartisan and he financially supported Hillary

Rodham Clinton and Republicans John McCain, Rudy Giuliani and Mitt Romney during the 2008 presidential campaign.

General Electric employees and their spouses, however, supported Obama over any other presidential candidate.

GE is a conglomerate with interests in diversified technology, media and financial services.

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