

Obama Announces \$500M High-Tech Manufacturing Incentive

Julie Pace, Associated Press

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Imagining advances from lighter cars to smarter robots, President Barack Obama is announcing a \$500 million project to spur high-technology manufacturing, a sector of U.S. industry that presidential advisers say has lost ground to such competitors as Germany and Japan.

On Friday in Pittsburgh, Obama is to call for a joint effort by industry, universities and the federal government to help reposition the United States as a leader in cutting-edge manufacturing, including biotechnology, robotics and nanotechnology — the development of new materials at the molecular level.

The initiative represents yet another effort by Obama to promote job-creation in the midst of an economic slowdown that has reduced hiring and weakened his job approval standing with the public. The president has tried to elevate his profile on the economy with weekly job-related trips to states that are key to his re-election.

In 2008, Obama beat John McCain, his Republican opponent, by a 55-45 percent margin in Pennsylvania. But presidential elections are usually competitive there, making the state a 2012 battleground.

He is to launch his new high-tech plan at Carnegie Mellon University, one of six universities in what the administration is calling the Advanced Manufacturing Partnership. The plan also features 11 manufacturing companies, including Ford Motor Co., Caterpillar Inc., Procter & Gamble Co. and Northrop Grumman Corp. Leading the effort will be Andrew Liveris, chairman, president and CEO of the Dow Chemical Co., and Susan Hockfield, president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

"The idea here is that we're bringing together all of the key players in a collaborative partnership to help identify these promising technologies, to invest in these promising technologies and to use them to drive a revitalization of American manufacturing," said Ron Bloom, assistant to the president for manufacturing policy.

Obama will be touring the Carnegie Mellon Robotics Institute, which is building machines that can help with bomb disposal, brain surgery, lawn mowing and paint scraping. Ultimately, some scientists at the institute are trying to figure out whether robots and humans can "treat each other as equal partners or teammates."

The administration's plan includes \$70 million for a robotics initiative. It also is aiming \$300 million toward national security industries and \$100 million for research and training to more quickly develop advanced materials at lower costs.

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Some of the \$500 million would come from existing allocations to government agencies, but other money is only reflected in Obama's 2012 budget request and would require approval by Congress.

Bloom envisioned nanotechnology that could create stronger but lighter materials.

"And what that means is, if we can be the leader in creating these kinds of materials, then we're going to have cars that are lighter, but yet as strong; we're going to have airplanes that are light and consume less energy in order to power them," he said.

The initiative is the brainchild of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology. In a report issued Friday, the council warned that U.S. leadership in manufacturing is at risk. It said the United States has been losing research and development associated with manufacturing to other countries. Most importantly, the council noted, the United States is losing the manufacturing competition for products that were invented in the U.S., including laptop computers, flat panel displays and lithium ion batteries.

In a teleconference with reporters, Bloom rejected a suggestion that the effort could be criticized because it could single out beneficiaries at the expense of others

"We're not trying to pick a winner," Bloom said. "We just want to give entrepreneurs and innovators tools to work with."

Associated Press writer Kevin Begos contributed to this report.

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