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U.S. Thought Leaders Offer Obama a Wide-Ranging Plan for Clean Energy

As the State of the Union Address Approaches, CEOs, Energy Experts & Civil Society Leaders Present White House with 200 Ideas for Presidential Action to Curb Climate Change with a Clean Energy Economy

WASHINGTON— January 21, 2014 — In last year’s State of the Union address, President Barack Obama told Congress that if it didn’t act on global climate change, he would. Now, with the next State of the Union message coming up next week, a diverse and influential group of leaders from beyond the Beltway has presented Obama with more than 200 ideas on how he can continue acting on that promise.

At a news conference today, former Colorado Gov. Bill Ritter released a report delivered to the White House last week, offering scores of ideas on how the Obama administration can move the nation closer to a clean energy economy and reduce America’s carbon emissions over the next three years, using his executive powers.

The report, which Ritter called a “comprehensive menu of options” for the President, was developed over eight months with the help of more than 100 CEOs, energy experts, academicians and thought leaders who participated in a series of roundtables last year. Ritter emphasized that not all of the participants agreed with all of the ideas, but the report reflects the recommendations that received the strongest support.

“The President has led the nation on clean energy and climate change since he took office, including the initiatives in the climate action plan he announced last June,” Ritter said. “In the face of congressional inaction, the new recommendations are intended to help the administration continue to lead.”

Ritter, who founded and directs the [Center for the New Energy Economy \(CNEE\)](#) at Colorado State University, briefed members of the President’s Cabinet and senior policy staff at the White House last week. Among those who attended were Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz; Interior Secretary Sally Jewell; Deputy EPA Administrator Robert Perciasepe; the Assistant to the President for Science and Technology, John Holdren; Dan Tangherlini, the Administrator of the General Services Administration; Nancy Sutley, Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality; and Dan Utech, the President’s top climate advisor.

In today's release of the report, titled [*Powering Forward: Presidential and Executive Agency Actions to Drive Clean Energy in America*](#), Ritter was joined by Heather Zichal, the former Deputy Assistant to the President for Energy and Climate Change; energy consultant and former Deputy Energy Secretary Susan Tierney; and Connecticut's Commissioner of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, Dan Esty.

"The climate action plan President Obama issued last June shows that the President is willing to act when Congress fails to do its job," said Zichal. "The *Powering Forward* report provides key recommendations for the White House to navigate America's crucial and inevitable transition to clean energy. And it's going to take all the tools we have available if we are to avoid the worst consequences of climate change."

Esty, whose state under the leadership of Gov. Dannel Malloy has become an example of innovative financing for clean energy technologies, noted that empowering state leadership and creating new opportunities for clean energy investments by the private sector are strong themes in the report.

"*Powering Forward* recognizes that states and localities have most of the legal authorities to help the nation make the transition to a cheaper, cleaner and more reliable energy future," Esty said. "But it also recognizes that there are many steps the federal government can take to help states lead, from technical and financial assistance to regulatory reforms."

"There's no question that consumers are demanding access to cleaner, more efficient power," said Alex Laskey, the president of Opower, and one of the thought leaders who participated in developing the report. "This report outlines recommendations that would enable the federal government to lead America on a path to doubling our energy productivity while dramatically increasing innovation across the country."

Among its many recommendations, *Powering Forward* urges the President and his administration to:

- Carefully compare the full life-cycle benefits and costs of each energy resource as his national energy policy is implemented. The report points out that additional opportunities exist to distinguish carbon-rich and low-carbon resources consistent with the President's goals for minimizing the greenhouse gas emissions most responsible for climate change.
- Direct the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to review and improve how it counts "green jobs" and to resume reporting the number of those jobs in the economy. The BLS suspended its reporting on green jobs last year after it was criticized for its methodology.
- Direct the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to issue clear preliminary guidance to states as early as possible in the regulatory process to encourage early adoption of new

energy efficiency and renewable energy measures, and to explain how they will be credited in state implementation plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from existing fossil-fuel power plants.

- Direct the Energy Information Administration (EIA) to review and if necessary improve its methods for projecting the growth of renewable energy technologies in years ahead. EIA has been criticized for underestimating renewable energy's contribution to the nation's energy mix.
- Direct federal agencies to work with the nation's electric utilities and utility regulators to update regulations that are getting in the way of clean energy technologies. Utility executives told CNEE that outdated regulations are making it difficult to accommodate new energy resources and technologies such as wind energy and rooftop solar systems. "As one utility executive put it, today's new energy technologies are 10 years ahead of utilities in the United States, and utilities are 10 years ahead of regulations," Ritter said.

"Big changes are underway in the electric industry," Tierney added. "It faces pressure from customers and from policy directives to modernize the grid, reduce pollution from power production, add renewable energy, and invest in energy-saving devices and building improvements."

"These require investments but also reduce revenues," Tierney explained. "Industry leaders raise 'death spiral' concerns. Utility executives say they need new business and regulatory models, but no one wants to be first. They have suggested ways that the federal government can lead in this area."

- Request that the IRS use its existing authorities where possible to issue rulings and interpretations of the tax code that increase incentives for private investors to capitalize clean energy technologies. "The idea is not to make the tax system more complex," Ritter said. "It's to make it more fair by offering clean energy the same investment tools and tax benefits now given to fossil fuels."
- Issue even more aggressive goals for the government's use of third-party financing for energy efficiency and renewable energy improvements in federal operations. "This financing tool allows the government to have guaranteed savings on its energy bills at no cost to taxpayers," Ritter said. "It can be used more widely than it's being used today."
- More clearly define the President's criteria for "responsible" natural gas production and require that oil and gas companies use best available production practices on federal lands.

The CNEE initiative was inspired by President Obama when he met last March with 14 corporate and private sector leaders at the White House, including Ritter. Obama convened the group to

hear their advice on energy policy. Following the meeting, Zichal and the other participants asked Ritter, who is known for his clean energy leadership as governor of Colorado, to reach out to experts and leaders across the country.

The complete set of recommendations is available on CNEE's website at www.poweringforwardplan.org. CNEE is inviting audiences to join the Twitter conversation about the Powering Forward plan starting at 9:30 a.m. EST on Jan. 21 at #PoweringForward.

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