

Putting the US firmly at the head of world energy developments

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar offers PES a stimulating and thought-provoking analysis of the future of the energy business throughout the US as we enter a brave new world of political development. Whereas previous generations may have been prepared to accept compromise and second-best, we now have a golden opportunity to forge ahead in the energy business, placing the US firmly at the forefront of technology and developments, he argues.





America is facing fresh and demanding challenges as we survey the new energy frontier. We are now all engaged upon the project of helping build America's clean energy economy – a project upon which our nation's competitiveness, our security, and our prosperity depend – a project that will help us build a strong and stable foundation for our economy to grow again.

It is also a project in which we have a powerful partner in the President of the United States, Barack Obama, and – for the first time ever – in the United States Department of the Interior (Dol). As managers of one-fifth of the nation's land and 1.7bn acres of ocean, it is time the Dol changes how we do business and open our doors to wise, responsible renewable energy production on our public lands. For at no time in our history has the need for a new energy policy been so urgent.

We import more than two-thirds of our oil, costing us hundreds of billions of dollars a year. Unemployment is at eight and a half per cent, carbon emissions are rising, our national security is threatened and countries like China and India are ready to cash in by leading the global clean energy economy. With millions of new jobs at stake, this is an opportunity America can't afford to miss. We must lead the clean energy revolution, and with the help of groups like the American Wind Energy Association (AWEA), we will spark it in the coming months by passing comprehensive energy legislation that lifts our nation's production of renewable energy and helps secure our energy future.

We all know well, what a clean energy economy means for our future. In Colorado, where I am from, for instance, we're adding thousands of jobs at new wind turbine manufacturing plants in places like Pueblo, Brighton, and Windsor. Ranchers across the eastern plains are earning extra money as wind farms spring to life. And in my native San Luis Valley – one of the poorest areas of the country – a new solar farm has brought hope for a brighter economic future.

For years, this Rural America was a Forgotten America, left out of Washington's priorities, and with fewer and fewer options for economic growth. Now, rural communities are on the leading edge of the renewable energy frontier and it's not just the big wind turbines that you see sprouting up. It's also in the small wind systems that farmers and ranchers are using

to help power their operations. I was proud to work with many AWEA members to create that small wind tax credit when I served in the Senate and I thank them for their support of that initiative.

From coast to coast, the clean energy revolution is gaining steam. In a little over a year, the number of jobs in the US wind industry has grown by more than 75%. It's estimated that if we fully pursue our potential for wind energy on land and offshore, wind can generate as much as 20 per cent of our electricity by 2030 and create a quarter of a million jobs in the process. As President Obama has said: It's a 'win-win' – good for the environment, great for the economy. To be sure, presidents since Richard Nixon have talked about energy independence, but the American people have seen few results.

In four decades, our dependence on foreign oil has doubled. So Americans rightly want to know how this time will be different. How will President Obama make good on his promise to re-power America and reduce our dangerous dependence on foreign oil? In large measure, the answer lies where no one before has thought to look: in the vast deserts, plains, forests and oceans that belong to every American but which, until now, have largely been unexplored for their vast renewable energy potential.

The clean energy potential on America's public lands is staggering. Americans have an estimated 206 gigawatts of wind energy potential on public lands in the West, an estimated 2,900 gigawatts of solar energy potential in the southwest and an estimated 1,000 gigawatts of wind energy potential in waters off the Atlantic coast alone. These American landscapes, with their unharassed renewable energy potential, are part of the new energy frontier for President Obama.

To wisely develop these resources, the Dol has already begun to open its doors to good ideas for large-scale renewable energy projects that protect our land, water, and wildlife. We have, for example, done something in the first 100 days that should have been completed years ago. And that is to finally establish rules of the road for offshore wind development. Dozens of applications to build offshore wind farms are currently stacked up or stuck in red tape. But with this framework, and by working with Chairman Jon Wellinghoff of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, (FERC)

to clear up federal jurisdictional questions between our FERC and DoI, companies with proposed projects finally have the certainty of a logical permitting process.

It is a huge step forward that allows us to move ahead with developing America's unbridled offshore renewable energy potential. I believe we can surpass Denmark, which produces almost 20 per cent of its electricity through wind power, and lead the world in offshore wind production. The DoI is also changing how it does business onshore. The agency has long had a mandate to support responsible oil, gas, and coal development, but we are now also opening the way for solar, wind, biomass and geothermal projects in appropriate areas of our public lands. And there is strong interest from partners in the private sector. Interior's Bureau of Land Management has a backlog of some 200 solar energy applications and more than 25 wind project applications in western states. There are another 200 locations where applicants would like to begin site testing for future wind projects.

But the backlog in permits is just not acceptable. These are engineering jobs that would be created if we approved a solar project in the desert. These are construction jobs that would be created if we approved a new wind farm on the High Plains. But with no permit, there is no project. And with no project, no new jobs. That is why Interior is investing \$41m through the President's economic recovery plan to facilitate a rapid and responsible move to large-scale production of renewables on public lands.

It is also why President Obama's budget for 2010 will propose to create four Renewable Energy Coordination Offices in California, Nevada, Wyoming, and Arizona, along with smaller renewable energy teams in New Mexico, Idaho, Utah, Colorado and Oregon. These investments will help us swiftly complete reviews on the most ready-to-go projects. We believe that of the wind projects currently proposed on BLM lands, almost 1,400 megawatts of new capacity will be ready for construction by the end of 2010. That is enough to power more than 400,000 homes.

We also believe that of the solar projects currently proposed – more than 6,000 megawatts of new capacity, mostly in California, Arizona, and New Mexico – will be ready to go in the same time frame. That is around enough to power 1.8m

homes. We must be thoughtful, though, in how we develop this new energy frontier and take care not to damage our landscapes, wildlife, or traditional ways of life. For this reason, Interior is working with states, stakeholders, local communities, and other federal agencies to maximize renewable energy production while minimizing impacts to the environment.

The zones we identify in the Nevada desert, for example, will have high solar energy potential, be close to transmission lines, and away from environmentally-sensitive areas, national parks and wilderness areas. We are also assigning high priority to completing the appropriate environmental review and permitting of transmission corridors and right-of-way applications that are necessary to deliver renewable energy to consumers. We have to connect the sun of the deserts and the wind of the plains with the places where people live. With the investments we are making through the President's economic recovery plan, we believe we'll be able to complete the reviews and permits for several new transmission projects so they can be ready for construction by 2010. We may have 1500 new kilovolts of transmission ready for construction in California, close to 900 new kilovolts in Idaho, 1,000 in Nevada and more in Montana and Wyoming.

This new transmission infrastructure can be part of a new national electrical supergrid that can help move this clean power not just to the closest load center, but back and forth across the country to areas of highest demand. President Obama and I believe that exploring and developing America's new energy frontier will help us power our clean energy economy. But it will also transform our relationship with the American landscape. Producing oil, gas, and coal on our public lands must and will continue and we will continue to find better ways to develop and use these resources, including through carbon capture and sequestration and other advanced coal technologies. But with wise renewable energy development we can also move beyond the old divisions that defined our management of public lands for the last century: beyond extraction against protection; beyond energy versus the environment. In harnessing renewable resources we act as stewards of our lands – like farmers who harvest abundant supplies but protect the resources that will sustain us for generations.

It is the same balance my parents and grandparents taught me on the lands my family has farmed and ranched for five generations. It is the balance we should aspire to in our policies for our nation's lands and for our energy future. Of course, the path into the new energy frontier will, at times, feel steep and naysayers will cry out that our country is not up to the challenge.

We have heard voices like these before. They rise each time our country determines to remake itself for a new era – against President Lincoln and the transcontinental railroad, against President Eisenhower's vision for an interstate highway system and indeed, against President Kennedy when he set America's sights on the moon.

But to stand still while the world rushes ahead is a perilous and temporary comfort. We cannot accept that the new energy frontier is too far, or the road too rough, for the urgency of the problem, and the speed at which our world is changing, gives us no choice but to transform a moment of crisis into a foundation for lasting economic growth.

We will succeed in this project of remaking America. We will succeed because our spirit fuels our determination and gives us hope that we can fulfil America's great promise. We will succeed because President Obama and I will do all we can to support the innovation and entrepreneurship that will repower our nation. Together we will recover. Together we will rebuild. And together our economy will lead the world once again. ▴



Kenneth Salazar currently serves as United States Secretary of Interior in the Obama Administration. A Democrat, he served as Attorney General of Colorado before winning a US Senate seat in the 2004 election. He became the junior Senator from Colorado in January 2005 and became the senior Senator following Wayne Allard's retirement in January 2009.