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Remarks at Southern California Edison's Electric Vehicle Technical Center in Pomona, California

March 19, 2009

The President. Thank you, guys. Thank you. Please, everybody have a seat. Well, first of all, Levon, what a wonderful story. I can tell you're a great dad, and Alex is lucky to have you.

I want to make some additional acknowledgments. We've got a lot of dignitaries here, people who were helpful in helping to pull this together. First of all, the Congresswoman from this district, Grace Napolitano, there she is right there. We've got Senator Gloria Negrete McLeod. Did I pronounce that properly? No? Why don't you help me out?

Senator Gloria Negrete McLeod. Negrete McLeod.

The President. Negrete McLeod—so nice to see you. Assemblywoman Norma Torres, Senator Christine Kehoe, good to see you; Senator Ron Calderon. We've got the Mayor of Long Beach, Mayor Bob Foster is here; we've got the Mayor of Pomona, Mayor Elliott Rothman. We've got Village Academy High School students who are here—in the house. Ted Craver, who is the CEO of Edison International, is here, and just helped us on the tour. Go ahead and stand. Thank you, Ted. We've got Al Fohrer, who is the CEO of Southern California Edison, who is here. We have Ed Kjaer, who just gave me the tour, right here; Pat Lavin, business manager, IBEW Local 47.

Thank you all for taking the time to be here. And it is good to be back in California. It's always nice to get out of Washington for a little bit, recharge your batteries. [*Laughter*] You know a little bit about that here. [*Laughter*] I want to thank the folks here at the Electric Vehicle Technical Center for the tour we just had.

Yesterday I was in Costa Mesa talking with people about this economic downturn that we're in. It's a downturn that's hitting this State as much as any State in the Union. One out of 10 Californians are out of work and actively looking for jobs. The foreclosure crisis has had a devastating impact on southern California in particular. But Californians aren't just bearing the brunt of this crisis; you are doing what needs to be done to overcome it.

This workshop is a perfect example of that. Day by day, test by test, trial by painstaking trial, the scientists, the engineers, the workers at this site are developing the ideas and innovations that our future depend on. It's your ingenuity that will help create the new jobs and new industries of tomorrow.

I know it's not easy. There are days, I'm sure, when progress seems fleeting and days when it feels like you're making no progress at all. That's how it feels in the White House sometimes too. [*Laughter*] But often, our greatest discoveries are born not in a flash of brilliance, but in the crucible of a deliberate effort over time. And often they take something more than imagination and dedication alone; often they take an investment and a commitment from government. That's how we sent a man to the Moon. That's how we were able to launch a worldwide web. And it's how we'll help to build the clean-energy economy that's the key to our competitiveness in the 21st century.

We'll do this because we know, as Levon just said, that the nation that leads on energy will be the nation that leads the world in the 21st century. Our children's futures depend on it.

That's why, around the world, nations are racing to lead in these industries of the future. Germany is leading the world in solar power. Spain generates almost 30 percent of its power by harnessing the wind, while we manage less than 1 percent. Japan is producing the batteries that currently power American hybrid cars.

So the problem is not a lack of technology. You're producing the technology right here. The problem is that for decades we've avoided doing what we must do as a nation to turn challenge into opportunity. As a consequence, we import more oil than we did on 9/11. The 1908 Model T—think about this—the 1908 Model T earned better gas mileage than the typical SUV in 2008. Think about that—a hundred years later and we're getting less gas mileage, not better, on SUVs. Even as our economy has been transformed by new forms of technology, our electric grid looks largely the same as it did half a century ago.

So we have a choice to make. We can remain one of the world's leading importers of foreign oil, or we can make the investments that would allow us to become the world's leading exporter of renewable energy. We can let climate change continue to go unchecked, or we can help stop it. We can let the jobs of tomorrow be created abroad, or we can create those jobs right here in America and lay the foundation for lasting prosperity.

And that's what my recovery plan does. It will create or save 3.5 million jobs, nearly 400,000 of them right here in California, in part, by making investments in areas critical to our long-term growth. And that is the forward-thinking purpose of the budget that I submitted to Congress. It's a budget that makes hard choices about where to save and where to spend, that makes overdue investments in education, health care, and, yes, in energy—investments that will catalyze innovation and industry, create green jobs, and launch clean, renewable energy companies right here in California.

Over the next 3 years, we will double this Nation's supply of renewable energy. We've also made the largest investment in basic research funding in American history, an investment that will spur not only new discoveries in energy but breakthroughs in science and technology. We will invest $15 billion a year to develop technologies like wind power and solar power, advanced biofuels, clean coal, and fuel-efficient cars and trucks that are built right here in the United States of America.

We will soon lay down thousands of miles of powerlines that can create new energy in cities and towns across this country. And we will put Americans to work making homes and buildings more efficient so that we can save billions of dollars on our energy bill, just like you've done in California for decades. And we will put 1 million plug-in hybrid vehicles on America's roads by 2015. That's what we're going to focus on.

Now, because these cars of tomorrow require batteries of tomorrow, I'm announcing that the Department of Energy is launching a $2 billion competitive grant program under the Recovery Act that will spark the manufacturing of the batteries and parts that run these cars, that will allow for the upgrading of factories that will produce them, and in the process, create thousands of jobs in facilities like this one all across America.

Show us that your idea or your company is best suited to meet America's challenges, and we will give you the chance to prove it. And just because I'm here today doesn't exempt all of you from that challenge. Every company that wants a shot at these tax dollars is going to have to prove their worth. So, Levon, you're going to have to work hard. [*Laughter*]

We're also making a $400 million downpayment on the infrastructure necessary to get these cars on the road. And because these cars won't leave the showroom unless consumers

buy them, the Recovery Act includes a new tax credit of $7,500 to encourage Americans to plug one in at home.

Now, true to form, true to form, California has already forged ahead with its own plans rather than wait for Washington. It's fitting that the State home to the first freeway and the first gas station is already at work devising the next freeway and the next gas station. This green freeway you're planning with Oregon and Washington would link your States with a network of rest stops that allow you to do more than just grab a cup of coffee, but also charge your car, refuel it with hydrogen or biofuels, swap out a battery in the time it takes to fill a gas tank. Charging stations have begun to pop up around downtown San Francisco, and that city has just joined with San Jose and Oakland with the vision of becoming the electric vehicle capital of the United States.

And here at Southern California Edison and all across the country, in factories and laboratories, at the Big Three and at small startups, these innovations are taking place right now. In Michigan and Ohio and right here in California, we're seeing exciting developments in this field as hard-working men and women like you are already laying the groundwork for this new industry. Even as our American automakers are undergoing some painful adjustments, they are also retooling and reimagining themselves into an industry that can compete and win, and millions of jobs depend on it.

So this is the critical work you're doing, but it's just one component of what must be a comprehensive energy plan. And that's why we're making an $11 billion investment in upgrading our power grid, so that it can carry renewable energy from the far-flung places that harness or produce it to the cities that use it. That's why we'll create jobs retrofitting millions of homes and cutting energy use in Federal buildings by one quarter, saving the American taxpayer $1.5 billion each year.

These are challenging times, but we know we can do this. It won't come without a cost; it won't be easy. We've got 240 million cars already on the road. We've got to upgrade the world's largest energy grid while it's already in use. And other countries aren't standing around and waiting for us; they're forging ahead with their own bold energy plans.

But this is the thing we have to remember: We've faced tough challenges before. At our best, we have never relied on hope and chance alone. Time and time again, we've tapped those great American resources: industriousness and ingenuity. That, after all, is what California is all about. This is a State that has always drawn people who've had their eyes set on the horizon, who've always dreamed of a future that others thought beyond reach. That's the spirit that you are reclaiming here at the Electric Vehicle Test Center. That's the spirit we need to reclaim all across the country.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:59 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Levon Atarian, foreman, Electric Vehicle Technical Center, Southern California Edison, who introduced the President, and his son Alex; Rep. Grace F. Napolitano of California; California State Senators Gloria Negrete McLeod, Christine Kehoe, and Ronald S. Calderon; Norma J. Torres, California State assemblywoman; and Ed Kjaes, senior engineer, Electric Vehicle Technical Center, Southern California Edison.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Southern California Edison's Electric Vehicle Technical Center in Pomona, CA.

Locations: Pomona, CA.

Names: Atarian, Alex; Atarian, Levon; Calderon, Ron S.; Craver, Theodore F., Jr.; Fohrer, Alan J.; Foster, Bob; Kehoe, Christine T.; Kjaer, Ed; Lavin, Patrick; McLeod, Gloria Negrete; Napolitano, Grace F.; Rothman, Elliott; Torres, Norma J.

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