



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on February 21, 2012

## Indian Tribes Hop Aboard Obama's "Clean Energy" Gravy Train

Of the \$6.5 million in grants, \$3.6 million will be spent on "feasibility studies." According to an Energy Department [press release](#), the money will be distributed among 13 projects "to assess the technical and economic viability of developing renewable energy resources on tribal lands to generate utility-scale power or study the feasibility of installing renewable energy systems on buildings to reduce energy use by 30 percent."



The remaining grant money will be split between "pre-construction development activities" (\$1.7 million for four projects) — such as obtaining permits, developing designs, and finalizing financing — and actual installation of projects (\$1.3 million for two projects). The two projects being deployed are a \$1.1-million "waste gasification energy recovery facility" that converts municipal waste into electricity for the Oneida tribe of Wisconsin and a \$147,000 "cordwood-fired biomass energy system" (i.e., a fireplace or wood stove) to heat the Jemez Pueblo tribe's New Mexico visitors center. Many of the feasibility studies cost more than the projects being deployed.

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"As President Obama highlighted in the State of the Union, the administration is committed to building an American economy that lasts and leverages our nation's clean energy resources," Energy Secretary Steven Chu said in the press release. "The awards announced today will help Tribes across the country advance a sustainable energy future for their local communities, spur economic development, and advance innovative clean energy technologies."

Given the Obama administration's success rate in selecting worthy "clean energy" projects to shower with taxpayer dollars — [Solyndra](#), anyone? — Chu's optimistic forecast must be taken with several grains of sodium chloride.

In fact, decades of federal interference in the energy sector — penalizing oil and coal companies, preventing the development of domestic energy sources, and lavishing subsidies on politically popular



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but unworkable alternatives — have resulted in ever-increasing dependence on foreign energy sources and “wasted energy, wasted taxpayer dollars, and misdirected resources,” as *The New American’s* [Bob Adelman](#) put it. One can only assume that the Obama administration’s subsidies for Indians’ energy projects will have similar effects. (Such unconstitutional lunacy, by the way, knows no party bounds: The department says it is issuing the tribal grants “under the authority of Title V of the Energy Policy Act of 2005,” a year in which Republicans controlled both houses of Congress and the presidency.)

One Indian tribe, the Navajo, appears to have figured out that Washington is the problem, not the solution, and is actually calling for *less* federal involvement in tribal energy development, according to the *Navajo Post*.

“The unreasonable requirements of federal agencies cost tribes essential jobs and revenues,” Navajo Nation Vice President Rex Lee Jim told the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs last week. “The way to accomplish economic self-sufficiency is to minimize federal involvement in tribal energy development, and maximize tribal decision-making.”

The same could be said for the American economy as a whole and its energy sector in particular. Get Uncle Sam out of the way and watch both soar.

Unfortunately, Jim, like many Americans of various ethnicities, isn’t quite ready to quit accepting handouts from Washington. Wrote the *Post*:

On the issue of tribal energy resource agreements (TERAs), Vice President Jim stated the need for Congress to consider providing grants to tribes for capacity building. “The Navajo Nation is very interested in using TERAs. It requires significant capacity in terms of staffing. We need help to fully develop capacity, so we urge Congress to provide grants in those areas,” Jim added.

But the Navajo, of all people, should be aware of just how destructive government money can be. Many American Indians have been on the federal dole for decades, with predictable results: “Fifty percent of Navajo people live below the federal poverty line with 50% unemployment,” reports the *Post*. And, of course, with federal money comes an entangling web of strings — the very thing Jim told the committee was hampering tribal self-sufficiency and energy development.

The federal government is leading the Indian tribes down the same dangerous path it has led the rest of the country for a long, long time. The tribal energy grants should be brought to a halt, as should all other federal energy subsidies. Ending all energy-related subsidies, along with the reams of regulations hindering the development of valuable domestic energy sources, would improve the lot of all Americans, including those with the lengthiest heritage in this resource-rich but increasingly freedom-poor land.



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