



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on March 23, 2012

Obama Bolsters Support for Clean Energy at Nevada Solar Plant

President Obama embarked on a four-state energy tour this week and made his first stop in Boulder City, a Nevada town about 20 miles outside Las Vegas. The town is home to the Copper Mountain Solar 1 Facility, the largest photovoltaic solar power plant in the United States, where the President renewed his support for the solar industry.



Republicans have repeatedly censured the President for a slew of Energy Department-sponsored loans that have resulted in taxpayer-subsidized failures, most notable being the demise of solar panel-maker Solyndra. "This is one of those interesting left-wing ideas which works theoretically as long as it's not real," GOP presidential candidate Newt Gingrich [said](#) Wednesday. "And then you put in a half billion dollars and you go, 'Oh that didn't quite work.'"

"Now you'd think, given this extraordinary sight, given the fact that this is creating jobs, generating power, helping to keep our environment clean, making us more competitive globally — you'd think that everybody would be supportive of solar power," Obama [asserted](#) during his Boulder City speech, with thousands of solar panels serving as a backdrop. "And yet, if some politicians have their way, there won't be any more public investment in solar energy."

However, critics note that Obama's unabashed pitch for clean-energy job creation has run stale. For instance, the Copper Mountain Solar 1 Facility has only 10 full-time employees, despite being the largest photovoltaic plant in the country. The effectiveness of solar-energy production is also in question, as the Nevada facility pumps out just 58 megawatts per hour to produce energy for 17,000 homes, while a coal-fired power plant can generate 600 megawatts per hour and about seven times as much electricity.

The Copper Mountain plant has received more than \$40 million in federal tax credits for its construction, which at its peak employed 350 workers (but as previously stated, that number has now plummeted to 10). Furthermore, the solar panels for the plant were constructed by First Solar, a company that raked in more than \$1.6 billion in federal loans from the Energy Department.

But still, Obama railed against Republicans in Congress who have been calling such green-energy jobs "artificial." "One member of Congress, who shall remain unnamed, called these jobs 'phony,'" the President said, referring to Rep. John Fleming (R-La.). "Think about that mindset, that attitude, that says because something is new it must not be real. You know if these guys were around when Columbus



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set sail, they'd be charter members of the flat earth society."

In defending the collapse of Solyndra, Obama argued that not every technology is destined for success, as he compared the bankrupt solar panel firm with failed technologies such as the VCR and Beta tapes. "Not every auto company succeeded in the early days of the auto industry," he [added](#). "Not every airplane manufacturer succeeded in the early days of aviation. But we understood as Americans that if we keep on this track, and we're at the cutting edge, then that ultimately will make our economy stronger and it will make the United States stronger."

Observers largely acknowledge that Obama's four-state tour is a political campaign intended to deflect a flurry of criticism stemming from recent spikes in gas prices. With the average price of gasoline rising near the \$4-a-gallon mark, the President's approval ratings have endured a significant reduction, as Americans feel increasing pain at the pump.

Recent polls show that voters believe the President does have a role in controlling the price of gasoline. For instance, a [poll](#) conducted by CBS News and the *New York Times* found that 54 percent of Americans believe gas prices are something a President can do a lot about, while only 36 percent said it's beyond his control.

The Republican National Committee said Obama's pit stop in Nevada is little more than "energy spin." "It's clear the president is on defense on energy thanks to higher gas prices, and no amount of campaigning is going to change that," charged RNC spokeswoman Kirsten Kukowski. "From having no energy policy to his false promises on production and [the] Keystone [XL Pipeline], President Obama has a lot of work to do to convince voters he cares about their pain at the pump," she added. "Obama loves to say he doesn't have a silver bullet when it comes to gas prices, but the fact is doing nothing isn't an option."

Photo: President Barack Obama speaks after touring Semptra's Copper Mountain Solar 1 facility, March 21, 2012, in Boulder City, Nev.: AP

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