



by Scott Horsley

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President Obama called on Congress to pass rebates for people who make their homes energy efficient. Addressing an audience in Savannah, Ga., Obama said the program would save Americans money, create jobs and reduce dependence on foreign oil.

MICHELE NORRIS, host:

This is ALL THINGS CONSIDERED from NPR News. I'm Michele Norris.

MELISSA BLOCK, host:

And I'm Melissa Block.

President Obama is planning another health care speech tomorrow, setting up what could be a final legislative push. But many voters are more concerned now about jobs than health care. And it's those voters that the president has been trying to reassure with his regular trips outside Washington to talk about jobs.

Today, he was stressing green energy jobs in Savannah, Georgia. NPR's Scott Horsley was there.

SCOTT HORSLEY: The president visited Savannah Technical College where workers in training are learning to install solar panels, insulation and high-efficiency air conditioners.

To help create demand for those workers, Mr. Obama wants Congress to approve a \$6 billion rebate program called Home Star. It would reward homeowners for investing in energy efficiency upgrades.

President BARACK OBAMA: We know this will save families as much as several hundred dollars on their utilities. We know it will make our economy less dependent on fossil fuels, helping to protect the planet for future generations. But I want to emphasize that Home Star will also create business and spur hiring up and down the economy.

HORSLEY: Under the president's proposal, homeowners who make energy-saving improvements could get instant rebates of one to \$3,000. Like last year's Cash for Clunkers Program, the rebates would be temporary, designed to push consumers into acting now.

The president says most of the resulting jobs, making and installing energy-efficient products, would be here in the United States.

Pres. OBAMA: It's very hard to ship windows from China.

HORSLEY: Larry Laseter thinks the rebates are just what's needed to prompt more homeowners into action. His firm, Masco Home Services, has opened five new offices around the country to capitalize on the growing efficiency business.

Mr. LARRY LASETER (President, Masco Home Services): We are actively recruiting, hiring and training people to put them back to work. Probably 80 percent of the people we hire are from the construction trade.

HORSLEY: That would be welcome in Georgia where the unemployment rate is even higher than the national average, 10.3 percent, and unemployment in construction is higher still.

The rebate idea, which the president first proposed late last year, was not included in the jobs bill passed by the House, but it is under consideration in the Senate.

The president observed today that working stuff through Congress is more than an ocean. In recent days, the White House has complained repeatedly that one Republican senator, Jim Bunning of Kentucky, has singlehandedly delayed approval of unemployment benefits, transportation funding and a variety of other measures.

Nowhere have congressional delays been more frustrating to the White House than health care. After last week's bipartisan summit meeting, Mr. Obama is expected to outline what aides are calling a way forward tomorrow.

In a letter to Republican and Democratic congressional leaders today, Mr. Obama promised to include several GOP ideas, including bigger state experiments with malpractice reform and an explicit option for high-deductible insurance plans.

Even as he devotes time and energy to the health care debate though, the president insists he's not neglecting what he calls his most important task -jobs.

Pres. OBAMA: That was my focus last year and that is my focus this year.

HORSLEY: The president's spokesman said again today, Washington should be able to do more than one thing at a time.

Scott Horsley, NPR News, Savannah, Georgia.

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