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News About the Environment

Obama compares oil sands to coal

By ROB GILLIES
The Associated Press
Tuesday, February 17, 2009; 11:19 PM

OTTAWA -- President Barack Obama, in advance of his first foreign trip, said Tuesday that Canada's oil sands operations leave a carbon footprint that adds to climate change concerns.

Obama, who heads to Canada on Thursday, expressed concern about the environmental impact of the oil sands in an interview with the Canadian Broadcasting Corp.

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper has said energy security and the environmental impact of Alberta's massive oil sands operations will be priorities during his meeting with the new U.S. leader. Harper is expected to lobby Obama on the merits of the oil sands as a safe and secure source of oil.

But critics say the growing operations by major oil companies will increase greenhouse gas emissions and threaten Alberta's rivers and forests. Experts say producing a barrel of oil from sand results in emissions three times greater than a conventional barrel of oil.

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Obama likened the carbon footprint of the oil sands with that of the U.S. coal industry.

"What we know is that oil sands creates a big carbon footprint. So the dilemma that Canada faces, the United States faces, and China and the entire world faces is how do we obtain the energy that we need to grow our economies in a way that is not rapidly accelerating climate change," Obama said.

Obama said he would like to work with Canada on developing carbon capture and storage to deal with the massive emissions coming out of both the American coal and Alberta oil industries. The new largely unproven technology would bury harmful emissions underground. The Obama administration dedicated billions from its economic stimulus package to renewable energy and new green technologies.

"I think to the extent that Canada and the United States can collaborate on ways that we can sequester carbon, capture greenhouse gases before they're emitted into the atmosphere, that's going to be good for everybody," Obama said.

Obama has criticized America's dependence on Middle East oil and has said he'll get serious about energy independence. The Bush administration viewed oil-rich Canada as a reliable source of energy that will help reduce reliance on Middle East oil.

Canada has warned Washington would lose energy security if it doesn't take Alberta's oil. Daily production of 1.2 million barrels from the oil sands is expected to nearly triple to 3.3 million barrels in 2020.

The president also applauded Canada's banking system, which has avoided government bailouts and has not experienced the failure of any major financial institution.

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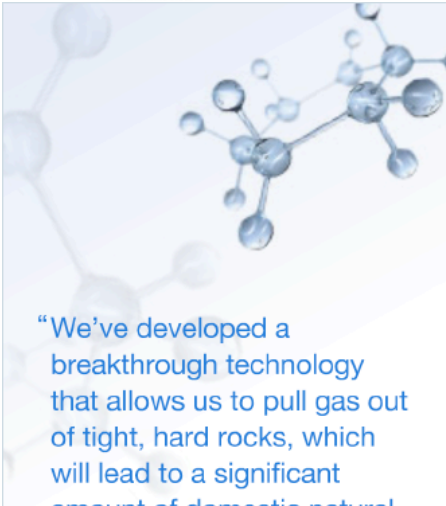
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"One of the things that I think has been striking about Canada is that in the midst of this enormous economic crisis, I think Canada has shown itself to be a pretty good manager of the financial system in the economy in ways that we haven't always been here in the United States," Obama said.

"And I think that's important for us to take note of, that it's possible for us to have a vibrant banking sector, for example, without taking some of the wild risks that have resulted in so much trouble on Wall Street," he said.

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