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White House to Promote Energy-Efficient Building

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WASHINGTON--The White House on Thursday will unveil a five-point plan to persuade owners of commercial buildings to retrofit them to be more energy efficient, but aides will not say how much the program will cost.

President Barack Obama plans to unveil the program on a visit Thursday to State College, Pa., where he will tour labs at Penn State University focused on advanced materials and energy-efficient building. He will also speak at the university about the importance of investing in clean energy. The event and the proposals are part of the new "win the future" economic message from the White House, where the president argues that the nation's long-term competitiveness depends on developing clean energy sources and other advances.

The program is mostly a set of carrots that the administration hopes will persuade private businesses to invest in retrofitting of existing commercial facilities. They include: more lucrative tax breaks to blunt the cost, easier access to loans to pay for upgrades and a new competitive grant program to encourage state and local governments to upgrade their standards.

The grant program is modeled on the Race to the Top program in the Education Department, which prods states to toughen standards and make other overhauls to qualify for grants, an administration official said.

In addition, Mr. Obama will ask chief executives and university presidents to "make their organizations leaders in saving energy," the White House said.

The goal is to increase energy efficiency in commercial buildings nationwide by 20% by 2020.

Administration officials hosted a conference call for reporters to outline the initiative but would not answer questions about how much the proposals will cost. They would only say that the programs will be included in the president's budget proposal, out later this month, along with an ocean of other numbers regarding the federal budget.

Asked why they would not disclose the figures on the energy initiative now, one senior administration official said: "There is a lot of information in the budget and it will be out in due course."

The 2009 economic stimulus program included \$20 billion for building energy efficiency, though it was concentrated on residential homes and government buildings.

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