

The Breakdown

OUR ECONOMY, ONE STEP AT A TIME.

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Speech offers little clarity on renewable energy policy

Posted by [USC Annenberg School of Journalism](#) on September 8, 2011 10:52 PM

As part of Marketplace's coverage of President Barack Obama's address to Congress tonight, in which he unveiled a \$447 billion plan to invest in jobs, journalism students from the University of Southern California interviewed Los Angeles-area business owners and business leaders for reaction.

Even since the recession hit in 2008, the renewable energy industry has managed to expand, growing by 3.4 percent annually, according to a study by the Brookings Institute. But its success is tied to government incentives and energy mandates. Mark Mizrahi, chief executive of EnLink Geoenergy, a geothermal power service company, said his company suffered at the start of the recession as projects stalled and funding dried up. He's recovered some since then, but he knows his future depends on maintaining robust incentives and pollution standards.



Mark Mizrahi, chief executive, EnLink Geoenergy, a geothermal power service company. **LOCATION:** Los Angeles **YEARS IN BUSINESS:** 16 **NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES IN 2008:** 34 **NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES IN TODAY:** 30 **HIRING THIS YEAR:** "Yes"

On weathering the recession: "In the private sector, everyone stopped spending money and then public sector stopped spending money when tax money dried up and bond measures [that fund green energy] couldn't get passed. Even projects that were funded were pulled or postponed....For us the federal incentives were still there but it doesn't matter if you don't have money to invest; those only kick in if you spend money. If you don't spend money they don't do you any good."

On the President's speech: "I was deeply disappointed by the lack of any specifics about green technology and energy policy. Obama has mentioned before that they are an engine for job creation and there were some measures about it [in the first stimulus package]. Once that ended, there was a lot of wait and see. But if we're looking to grow the economy, green technology has been proven as an important part of that. Right now, the regulatory mechanism is all out of whack, with fossil fuels still too heavily subsidized. He didn't mention any of that in his speech. But his policies that seek to create infrastructure are a good standby for stimulating job growth. Plus better employment throughout the economy is of course good for all business."

What he'd like to see: At a minimum, we'd like to see some clarity and consistency in policy, whether it's tax incentives or energy standards or emission control... even something that's just on the horizon. Right now, things are subject to quick change. The price-control mechanisms for renewable energies are way off. Whatever incentives there are now are subject to whoever is in power and far too often they will come and go. In my company, we're cautiously optimistic.

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Things are still slow but by no means at the same level of three years ago. But the business is still growing and we're determined to continue to grow in spite of government inaction.

- Tom Dotan

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