

theregion

Energy

Obama conjures up Kennedy spirit

'Sputnik moment'

Clean energy can help the US seize control of its destiny

April Yee

The US President Barack Obama invoked the spirit of John F Kennedy in his annual state of the union speech this week to inspire Americans to embrace clean energy.

"We're telling America's scientists and engineers that if they assemble teams of the best minds in their fields, and focus on the hardest problems in clean energy, we'll fund the Apollo projects of our time," Mr Obama said.

Boosting the clean energy industry and fields such as IT and biomedical research would allow the US to seize control of its economic destiny, he said. He compared America's position today to that of half a century ago when the country lost the space race to the Soviet Union and its Sputnik satellite launch in 1957.

"But after investing in better research and education we didn't just surpass the Soviets, we unleashed a wave of innovation that created new industries and millions of new jobs," Mr Obama said. "This is our generation's Sputnik moment."

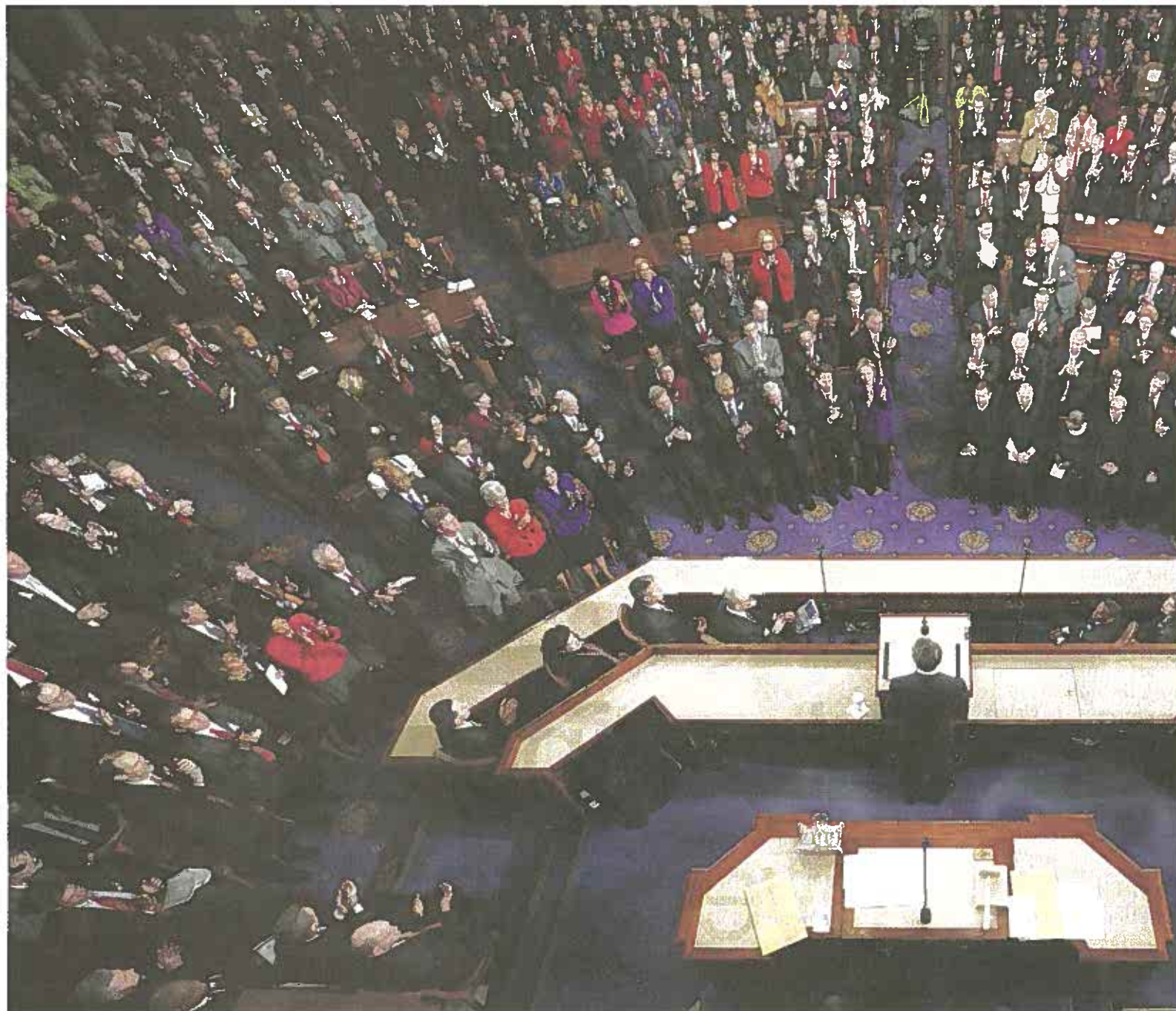
The head of the International Renewable Energy Agency, an inter-governmental organisation based in the UAE, said he hoped Mr Obama's push for clean energy would be picked up by other nations.

"His reference to a 'Sputnik moment' is a clear recognition of the need for transformative change, not only to address the threat of climate change but to provide energy security, employment and economic progress," said Adnan Amin, the agency's interim director general. "His words are relevant to all nations and transcend political divisions."

The US needs to increase its use of clean electricity – a term Mr Obama used to encompass solar and wind power, natural gas, nuclear energy and clean coal – to 80 per cent of all power production in the next two to three years to boost economic development and address climate change and security issues, the president said.

Mr Obama plans to back those ambitions by including funding for alternative energy research and development in next month's US budget proposal.

In Abu Dhabi, business leaders said the proposed clean energy development in the US could open doors to UAE investors and spark in-



Barack Obama urged Americans to embrace clean energy in his annual state of the union speech. Tim Sloan / AFP

novation across the Middle East.

"It will provide several opportunities for public and private partnerships, which are key to scaling up such technologies," said Dr Sultan al Jaber, the chief executive of Masdar, the Abu Dhabi Government's clean energy company. "Masdar looks forward to expanding collaboration with the United States in business, research and education."

The UAE wants 7 per cent of its energy to come from renewable sources in the next decade.

"The impact is more investment, which leads to better technology which is lower priced," said Sami Khoreibi, the founder of Enviro-mena Power Systems, an Abu Dhabi solar power company. "That's defi-

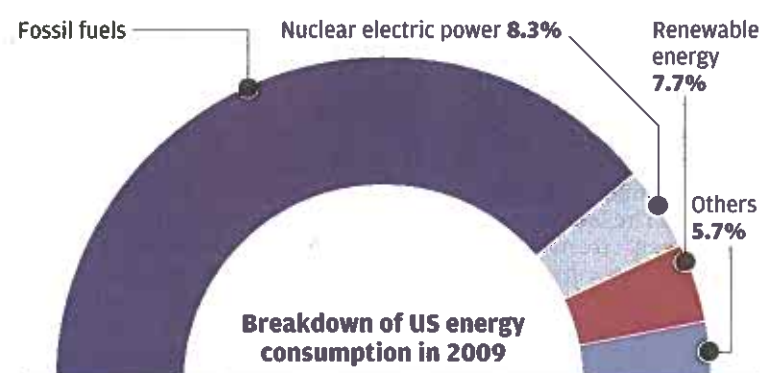
nately going to have an impact on the 7 per cent target here." Oil, gas and coal provides the US with 78 per cent of its power needs, a share that has doubled in the past half century, according to US Energy Information Administration figures.

Reforming the electricity sector is likely to be less of a challenge for the US, which in 2009 generated almost 54 per cent of its power from the clean energy sources Mr Obama named, without counting so-called clean coal, an expanding power source for the country.

Mr Obama also urged the US to become the first nation to put 1 million electric cars on its roads by 2015.

ayee@thenational.ae

Tale of the tape



Source: US Energy Information Administration