

# Obama Offers Training Plan Designed for High-Tech Jobs

By HELENE COOPER

DURHAM, N.C. — Confronting the challenge of running for re-election while the unemployment rate remains stubbornly high, President Obama convened a session of his new jobs council on Monday, offering a proposal to train 10,000 American engineering students a year in a program focused on filling high-tech jobs.

The program, which Mr. Obama unveiled during a visit to a lighting manufacturer here, would seek to marry private companies with colleges and universities in a bid to encourage students to focus on science, technology, engineering and math degrees.

“Right now, there are more than four job seekers for every job opening in America,” Mr. Obama said, in remarks at Cree Inc., which makes L.E.D. products. “But when it comes to science and high-tech fields, the opposite is true: businesses like this tell me they’re having a hard time finding workers to fill their job openings.”

In coming to North Carolina to promote his plans to keep high-tech, high-paying jobs in this country, Mr. Obama is trying to hang on to a state that he narrowly won in 2008. But highlighting the climb ahead for the president is North Carolina’s unemployment rate, which was 9.7 percent in April, the 10th highest in the country. The overall national jobless rate in May was 9.1 percent, up slightly from the month before.

“The world has changed,” Mr. Obama said. “And for a lot of our friends and neighbors, that change has been painful. Today the single most serious economic problem we face is getting people back to work.”

After his remarks at Cree, Mr. Obama met there with members of the jobs council he created. Two members of the group — Jeffrey R. Immelt, the chairman and chief executive of General Electric, and Kenneth I. Chenuit, the chairman and chief executive of American Express — laid out, in an op-ed article in The Wall Street Journal on Monday, a

few ideas the council is exploring to increase employment.

But none of the ideas, which included setting up job training initiatives, providing loans to small businesses and trying to increase tourism, contained any groundbreaking proposals.

“To truly bend the curve over the longer term, we need a more strategic view,” the two men acknowledged in the article. “Over the next 90 days, we will turn to addressing the actions needed to make a more significant, longer-term impact.”

They said they would deliver recommendations in September focusing on “fast-growth” companies, small businesses and the competitiveness of the country’s infrastructure.

It was unclear how Mr. Obama planned to finance his latest jobs proposals. The administration is locked in a debate with Congressional Republicans over long-term spending and deficit reduction, facing an August deadline for a decision on raising the country’s debt ceiling.

There was a touch of nostalgia to the president’s trip on Monday; he visited the Cree headquarters here three years ago, when he was a senator running for the presidency.

Mr. Obama said his hair was grayer now. But, he added, “I have a better plane so it’s a fair trade.”

After North Carolina, Mr. Obama headed to Florida, another crucial state for his re-election hopes; he has scheduled several fund-raisers as part of his effort to raise a record \$1 billion during this campaign.

On Tuesday, Mr. Obama is making a rare visit to Puerto Rico, as part of the Democratic Party’s campaign to woo more Hispanic voters back in the mainland United States.

***With unemployment high and an election in view, an effort to prepare key workers.***

