

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Message by President Obama on Occasion of Rosh Hashanah

Obama extends warmest wishes to all celebrating the Jewish new year

The White House
Office of the Press Secretary
September 7, 2010

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT ON THE OCCASION OF ROSH HASHANAH

As Jews in America and around the world celebrate the first of the High Holy Days I want to extend my warmest wishes for the New Year. L'shana Tova Tikatevu – may you be inscribed and sealed in the Book of Life.

Rosh Hashanah marks the beginning of the spiritual calendar and the birth of the world. It serves as a reminder of the special relationship between God and his children, now and always. And it calls us to look within ourselves – to repent for our sins; recommit ourselves to prayer; and remember the blessings that come from helping those in need.

Today, those lessons ring as true as they did thousands of years ago. And as we begin this New Year, it is more important than ever to believe in the power of humility and compassion to deepen our faith and repair our world.

At a time when too many of our friends and neighbors are struggling to keep food on the table and a roof over their heads, it is up to us to do what we can to help those less fortunate.

At a time when prejudice and oppression still exist in the shadows of our society, it is up to us to stand as a beacon of freedom and tolerance and embrace the diversity that has always made us stronger as a people.

And at a time when Israelis and Palestinians have returned to direct dialogue, it is up to us to encourage and support those who are willing to move beyond their differences and work towards security and peace in the Holy Land. Progress will not come easy, it will not come quick. But today we had an opportunity to move forward, toward the goal we share – two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

The scripture teaches us that there is “a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.” In this season of repentance and renewal, let us commit ourselves to a more hopeful future.

Michelle and I wish all who celebrate Rosh Hashanah a sweet year full of health and prosperity.

Americans Consume Less Energy, Less Fossil Fuel

Coal and oil use retreat in 2009 amid push for renewables

By Karin Rives
Staff Writer

Washington – Efforts to wean Americans off fossil fuels and onto green energy and conservation are beginning to pay off, a new study suggests. Households and businesses across the United States used significantly less coal and oil in 2009 than the year before, the study from the U.S. Department of Energy's Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory shows.

At the same time, more power generated by wind turbines, solar panels, biomass and other renewable energy sources flowed into the electric grid to offset the drop in use of fossil fuels.

The nation consumed 35.27 quadrillion Btu of oil in 2009, a 5 percent drop from the year before. A Btu, or British thermal unit, is used to measure energy. An average American home uses about 95 million Btu a year.

Consumption of coal declined even more: nearly 12 percent, the biggest drop in at least a decade.

Total U.S. energy use, meanwhile, decreased by 4.6 percent last year. While the economic recession was responsible for most of the decline, the push for more energy-efficient appliances and cars contributed, said A.J. Simon, the energy systems analyst who developed the report.

American consumption of electricity generated by wind power stations soared 35 percent in 2008. Last year was a record year for wind energy investments in the country, with 10,000 megawatts of new capacity installed that year, according to the American Wind Energy Association (AWEA), an industry trade group. The new installed capacity can power 2.4 million homes and generate as much power as three large nuclear power plants would, the group reported.

“The increase in renewables is a really good story, especially in the wind arena,” Simon said. “It’s a result of very good incentives and technological advancements. The investments put in place for wind in previous years came online in 2009. Even better, there are more projects in the pipeline for 2010 and beyond.”

AWEA has warned that wind power investments have dropped sharply this year, even if additional projects come online. The build-out is slowing in part because federal tax credits for such projects are expiring at the end of 2010. Congress' inability to pass comprehensive climate legislation this year also created uncertainties for investors, AWEA says.

At the same time, however, other green energy sources are picking up. According to Energy Department projections, renewables will account for 14 percent of total energy use by 2035, up from 8 percent in 2008.

The agency also predicts that energy consumption will decline steadily after 2013, regardless of economic conditions, because of new efficiency standards for vehicles and lighting that take effect that year.

U.S. Dance Students Back from Bolshoi with New Insights on Russia

Language program helps advance cultural connections

By Alexandra Draggeim
Staff Writer

Washington — In the midst of this year's sweltering Moscow summer, and notwithstanding the smoke from nearby peat fires, 10 young American ballet students were busy perfecting different dance positions at the Moscow State Academy of Choreography. Now back home from the Bolshoi Ballet Academy Summer Intensive program organized by the Russian American Foundation (RAF) and the renowned Bolshoi Ballet Academy, they ponder their new understanding not only of various forms of dance but also of the Russian people and Russian culture.

"Russia is more than just what I expected," said American student Sarah Wiese. "I think now that I have been so immersed in this culture, I can never leave it; it will always be a part of my life."

The Bolshoi initiative had received funding from a U.S. Department of State scholarship program providing American secondary school students with the opportunity to study less commonly taught languages, such as Russian, in the countries where they are actually spoken. Wiese told America.gov she is now more committed than ever to continue her Russian-language studies.

Like Wiese, many of the students said the summer program made a huge impact on their lives and has inspired them to continue to pursue their passion for ballet. "I had such an extreme passion for ballet before I left for this program that I thought it wouldn't be possible for my heart to expand more for ballet. But it has," explained Seth Ives. He observed that ballet is so prominent in Russian culture because Russians "respect ballet dancers and have a group passion for the beauty of the body."

"I think I turned into more of a 'bunhead' [female ballet dancer] there than before I came. I truly think this was my best summer in my life so far," said student dancer Mable Yiu.

Many of the American students in the Bolshoi Ballet

Academy program had received Russian ballet training in the United States and were excited to be able to visit the country with one of the oldest and most prestigious ballet academies. "My training is Russian, therefore it interested me as a culture," Micah Garton explained. "Since being here, I have a whole new understanding about Russia," he said.

Currently in its first year, the RAF's Bolshoi Ballet Academy program is different from other ballet programs in that it puts major emphasis on language and culture. The all-expenses-paid trip to Moscow from July 17 to August 28 included about 2.5 hours of ballet classes and 2.5 hours of Russian language classes every day. No previous knowledge of Russian was required.

"I never thought to have learned so much Russian as I did in six weeks. Everyone I have met — from the academy students in my ballet class, to the ladies who make our meals in the cafeteria, to the cashiers at the metro station have — all contributed to my experience here," said Wiese.

The opportunity to practice alongside Russian ballet students not only gave the Americans the chance to practice Russian, but also inspired them to pursue their passion for ballet. "The other students that were there that attend the academy year-round were also a big inspiration," said Yiu. "Whenever it wasn't our turn to dance, we would drool at some of them in awe of how amazing they were! It was also fun trying to communicate with them in Russian, trying to find out how old they were, and we even got to 'friend' some on Facebook," she added.

Ballet classes, conducted by Bolshoi Ballet Academy teachers, were taught in Russian so that the American students could improve their language skills and have a complete experience in a Russian ballet class. The courses included classical dance, ballet gymnastics and folk, scenic and historical dances, all of which are standard components of ballet choreography.

The American students said that the training they received helped them improve their technique tremendously. "The way I think now is a lot more about how to get the best and most technical line I can achieve. It isn't about getting your leg to your head, it is about doing it correctly, and with time and effort you will be able to achieve perfection," Ives said. "I improved 100-fold while being in Moscow," he added.

Although students lived in the academy dorms, on the weekends they would join Russian host families who have teenage children of similar ages. "They got to know what Russian youth life is through being with them on the weekends," said RAF Vice President Rina Kirshner.

The program's cultural component included trips to many Moscow sites, including a private tour of the Tsereteli Art Gallery, located in a beautiful neoclassical building near the center of the city. Students also visited places such as the Stanislavski Moscow Academic Music Theater, where they saw a performance of Don Quixote, a ballet choreographed by Marius Petipa that first premiered in Russia at the end of the 19th century.

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