

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks at the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Implementation Conference

March 12, 2009

Hello, everybody. Please have a seat. I've got my Illinois contingent over here. Please, everybody have a seat. Thank you so much.

I just wanted to stop by and say hello. I know that you heard from Joe Biden at the top of this session, and I wanted to let you know that we are very grateful to all of you for taking the time to come. We hope that this is being a productive session. And I want to emphasize that all of you are at the frontlines of what is probably the most important task that we have in this country over the next couple of years, and that's getting the economy started again.

I think all of you in your respective roles are hearing stories of people who are going through extraordinary hardship in your respective States. And we passed this American Recovery and Reinvestment Act because we strongly believe that this is an opportunity not only to deal with the immediate crisis, but also to lay the foundations for long-term growth and prosperity in this country.

And, you know, the American people are behind what we're doing. And the question then becomes, are we going to be able to deliver for them? They are going to be watching very carefully. And there are those who believe that Government doesn't have a role to play in this recovery. There are those who believe that we should be focusing exclusively on Wall Street when it comes to this crisis, and that we don't have time to worry about infrastructure, and we don't have time to worry about our health systems, and we don't have time to think about how we're going to improve our educational systems.

And all of you, what you do in the coming weeks and coming months, over the next couple of years is going to make a huge difference in whether or not the trust that the American people have placed in us is justified.

So my main message to all of you is, I think you're up to the task; I think you guys will do extraordinary work with using these precious tax dollars that the American people have given up in order to deliver on the kind of economic growth—short-term and long-term—and job creation that's going to be so important.

But we're going to need to work really hard, and we're going to have to make sure that every single dollar is well spent. We've got to go above and beyond what I think is the typical ways of doing business in order to make sure that the American people get the help that they need and that our economy gets the boost that it needs.

And so I've said before—I know Joe emphasized this to you earlier—if we see money being misspent, we're going to put a stop to it, and we will call it out, and we will publicize it. On the other hand, if the money is being spent as it needs to be spent, to rebuild our roads and our bridges and our schools and making sure that we are putting in place the kinds of infrastructure foundations that are necessary for economic growth over the long term, then I think all of us will benefit and our voters and our constituents, the people we work for, are going to be extraordinarily grateful.

So you've got this wonderful mission, and, you know, it's rare where you get a chance to put your shoulder to the wheel of history and move it in a better direction. This is such an

opportunity. I think—I hope all of you seize it. I know this is very tough work because you've got a lot of money coming out quickly, it's got to be spent wisely, you don't always have the infrastructure, the organizational structures to accommodate all this stuff right away, and you're going to have to build that and do so in record time.

But looking around, you guys look like pretty capable people. So I have great confidence in you, and I think you're going to do a wonderful job. We appreciate you. Good luck. And I'll be seeing you at some ribbon cuttings. All right. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:10 a.m. in Room 450 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Vice President Joe Biden.

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