

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks Following a Meeting With Business Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters

July 2, 2009

The President. Good afternoon, everybody. I just held a meeting with the CEOs of some of the most innovative energy companies in America to talk about growth and progress of a sector that represents a big piece of America's economic future. As our economy adapts to the challenges of a new century, new ways of producing and saving and distributing energy offer a unique opportunity to create millions of jobs for the American people.

And obviously, this is a timely discussion, on a day of sobering news. The job figures released this morning show that we lost 467,000 jobs last month. And while the average loss of about 4,000 [400,000]^{*} jobs per month this quarter is less devastating than the 700,000 per month that we lost in the previous quarter, and while there are continuing signs that the recession is slowing, obviously, this is little comfort to all those Americans who've lost their jobs.

Now, we've taken some extraordinary measures to blunt the hard edges of the worst recession of our lifetime and to offer assistance to those who've borne the brunt of this economic storm. But as I've said from the moment that I walked into the door of this White House, it took years for us to get into this mess, and it will take us more than a few months to turn it around.

And that's why the discussion that we had today is so important. It's men and women like these who will help lead us out of this recession and into a better future. My job, and our job as a government, is to do whatever we can to unleash the great, generative powers of the American economy by encouraging their efforts.

And I'm absolutely confident that we can, at this period of difficulty, prove once again what this Nation can achieve when challenged. And I'm confident that we're not only going to recover from this recession in the short term, but we're going to prosper in the long term. To do that, we have to act now to build a new foundation for lasting growth. And energy is one of the pillars of this new foundation, essential both to our recovery and our long-term prosperity.

I'm pleased to say that we've achieved more in the last few months to create a new clean energy economy than we had achieved in many decades before. The recovery plan will double our country's supply of renewable energy and is already creating new clean energy jobs. Thanks to a remarkable partnership between automakers, autoworkers, environmental advocates, and States, we also set in motion a new national policy to increase gas mileage and decrease carbon pollution for all new cars and trucks sold in this country, which is going to save us 1.8 billion barrels of oil.

And last Friday, the House of Representatives passed an extraordinary piece of legislation that would make renewable energy the profitable kind of energy in America. It will reduce our dependence on foreign oil. It will prevent the worst consequences of climate change. And above all, it holds the promise of millions of new jobs—jobs, by the way, that can't be outsourced.

* White House correction.

The CEOs standing behind me know a lot about these kinds of companies. These are folks whose companies are helping to lead the transformation towards a clean energy future. Even as we face tough economic times, even as we continue to lose jobs, the CEOs here told me that they're looking to hire new people, in some cases to double or even triple in size over the next few years. They are making money, and they are helping their customers save money on the energy front.

So these companies are vivid examples of the kind of future we can create, but it's now up to the Senate to continue the work that was begun in the House to forge this more prosperous future. We're going to need to set aside the posturing and the politics. And when we put aside the old ideological debates, then our choice is clear. It's a choice between slow decline and renewed prosperity; it's a choice between the past and the future.

The American people, I believe, want us to make the right choice, and I'm confident that the Senate will. For at every juncture in our history, we've chosen to seize big opportunities rather than fear big challenges. We've chosen to take responsibility. We've chosen to honor the sacrifices of those who came before us and fulfill our obligations to generations to come. That's what we're going to do this time as well.

Thank you very much, everybody.

Small Businesses

Q. Mr. President, do you have a message for the small businesses on health and economy?

The President. The message for small businesses is, many of these businesses started as small businesses, and they're now getting to be big businesses because of the extraordinary opportunities that are out there. Another message is that they should probably contact some of these CEOs because it turns out, they can save small businesses and large businesses alike up to 20 or 30 percent on their energy usage.

And when you hear the innovation that's taking place, everything from LED lighting that can save a huge amount on energy costs to new concrete materials that last longer and are waterproofed from the inside out—and that can mean that bridges and roads and buildings can last 20 or 30 years longer than using conventional concrete. When you look at what's being done with solar energy right now in places like Houston and Florida and the fact that many of these companies are exporting their goods and their services, but unfortunately, their biggest markets right now are Europe and Japan because we haven't done enough to emphasize clean energy in our own country, that gets you excited about the future.

And one of the things that I've consistently talked about since I took office, and on a day where we see that our economy is still having a tough time getting moving, is we're going to have to shoot for the future and not look backwards. So much of the debate around health care, so much of the debate around energy, has been based on this idea that somehow if we stand still and we don't do anything that we're going to be better off. And that's just not how this world works. It's certainly not how the modern economy works.

We know we're going to have to change how we use energy. We know we're going to have to change how we operate our health care systems. We know that we're going to have to change how we train our young people to compete in this new global economy. And so to make the argument that somehow we should just lock in on the status quo or perpetuate the same policies that got us into this mess in the first place, and that that somehow is going to solve our problems, just doesn't make any sense.

And what these folks are all about is the future, and that's what America has always been about. We are not folks who are scared of the future or look backwards. We always meet the challenges by moving forward. And that's what I think is going to happen this time as well.

Thanks, guys.

White House Energy Efficiency

Q. Mr. President, when are you going to get solar panels and a wind turbine at the White House, sir?

The President. I was just talking to Secretary Chu about how he is going to consult with these outstanding folks to figure out how we can improve energy efficiency here.

Q. When will that happen, Mr. President?

The President. I just told you; we're moving. Come on, guys. [*Laughter*] I don't have a date certain.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:37 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Energy Steven Chu.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Business leaders, meeting; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

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Subjects: Business and industry : Business leaders, meetings with President; Business and industry : Small and minority businesses; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Energy : Energy legislation, proposed; Energy : Foreign sources; Energy : Fuel efficiency standards, strengthening efforts; Energy : Solar and wind energy; Energy, Department of : Secretary; Environment : Carbon pollution; Environment : Climate change.

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