

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks at a Rally for Gubernatorial Candidate Thomas M. Barrett in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

August 16, 2010

Thank you. Hello, Milwaukee! Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you very much. Everybody, please have a seat. Have a seat. It is good to be back in Milwaukee, good to be back in the Midwest. Good to be out of Washington once in a while. [*Laughter*] Good to be in the great State of Wisconsin.

And looking out at this crowd, I know that so many of you did so much on behalf of my campaign. You were with us when we were up; you were with us when we were down. So if it weren't for so many of you, I would not be standing here as President today. And I am grateful to all of you. So thank you very much.

We've got a few special guests that I want to acknowledge: your outstanding Governor and wonderful first lady, Jim and Jessica Doyle are in the house; one of the finest Senators we have and a pretty good owner—although he talks a lot of smack about the Bucks versus the Bulls—[*laughter*]—we're going to see this year—Senator Herb Kohl; and a wonderful Member of Congress, Congresswoman Gwen Moore is here.

Now, as your President, it is my honor to stand here—where I understand Al McGuire won the championship with Marquette a while back—[*applause*]—see, just the smattering of applause shows that I'm getting older—[*laughter*]—because I vividly remember that championship and about half of you don't. [*Laughter*] But it's also a great honor to be here with Wisconsin's next Governor, Milwaukee's own Tom Barrett.

Now, Tom is the kind of leader this State needs right now. He's the kind of leader this country needs right now. This is a man of character. He hasn't forgotten where he came from. Grew up right here in Wisconsin; started off after college working on the assembly line at Harley-Davidson. And ever since then, he has been fighting to bring jobs and opportunity and hope to the people of this State.

And as this city's mayor, he's had success. He helped turn around the industrial wasteland into a thriving commercial center that supports nearly 3,000 jobs. He helped start a regional economic development group that helped bring another 2,000 jobs to Wisconsin in the past 10 months, a time when those jobs were desperately needed. No other candidate has this kind of record on jobs. No other candidate has put forth the kind of detailed plan that Tom's had—has been able to put forward to make sure that this State's economy is moving forward. And under his watch, this city has held the line on property taxes, it's expanded opportunity, it's put more cops on the street, and reduced crime as a result. But the most impressive thing about Tom goes beyond his accomplishments as an elected official. It goes to who he is as a human being. It goes to his character.

You know, I've heard stories about mayors who personally respond to calls about potholes and parking tickets and snowed-in driveways. But I've never heard about a mayor who risked his life to respond to an actual cry for help. That is some serious customer service from this mayor right here. Tom gets embarrassed when folks bring this up, but what he did for a local woman and her baby granddaughter when they were threatened by domestic violence, that's the kind of act you don't hear about every day. He stepped in, he tried to help, sustained

serious injuries as a result. That's what counts in a leader—when the cameras aren't rolling, when nobody is watching—that's the mark of real character.

That means this is a person who is going to fight for you each and every day. And that's why I know Tom Barrett is going to win this race and lead Wisconsin to a better day. That's the kind of leader we need. It's the kind of leader we need for an incredibly challenging time for America.

Eighteen months ago, I took office after nearly a decade of economic policies that gave us sluggish job growth and falling incomes and falling wages and a record deficit, policies that culminated in the worst recession in our lifetimes. In the last 6 months of 2008, 3 million American jobs were lost—3 million. The month I swore—I was sworn in, we lost nearly 800,000 jobs that month, January 2009; 600,000 the next month; 600,000 the month after that.

And behind each of these stories is a story of heartache and frustration: a factory worker who was just a few years shy of retiring suddenly loses his job at the local plant; or a single mom who keeps sending out job applications everywhere she can, and still waiting for the phone to ring, day after day after day; a college graduate who thought her degree would land her a good job with a decent paycheck, instead just has a mountain of debt; or a college—somebody who was bound for college suddenly found out that they couldn't afford it, had to defer their dreams.

I hear these stories every day. Every night, I read letters from folks around the country, good, decent people who are having a tough time, middle class families who never thought they would see the kind of hardship that they're seeing right now. And those struggles and hopes are why I ran for office in the first place. That's why so many of you supported me. And that's why I intend to keep fighting as hard as I can, for as long as it takes, until we turn this economy around. That is why I'm here. That is our goal. That's why Tom Barrett is running for Governor, to get this economy moving so every single person in Wisconsin who wants to work can find a job. That's what we're fighting for.

Now, we're not there yet. We know that. It's going to take a few years to repair the damage that was caused by this recession. But I am confident—as confident as I've been about anything—that we are headed in the right direction. This Nation is moving in the right direction. We are moving forward. And the most important thing we can do right now is to keep moving forward.

We need to keep our economy growing. We need to keep adding private sector jobs. We need to keep making progress on all these fronts, and we've got to do it faster.

What we don't need—the worst thing we could do is to go back to the very same policies that created this mess in the first place. That's the worst thing we could do. And in November, you're going to have that choice. The American people are going to walk into that voting booth and the question is going to be, are we going to move forward, or are we going to move backwards?

We didn't get to this point by accident. We got here after nearly 10 years of an economic agenda in Washington that was pretty easy to sum up: You cut taxes for millionaires and billionaires; you cut rules for special interests; you cut working folks loose to fend for themselves. If you're out of a job, tough luck, you're on your own. Don't have enough money for college? Tough luck, you're on your own. You don't have health insurance? Too bad, you're on your own. That was the philosophy of the last decade: You are on your own.

And now that we've actually begun to make progress, what we're seeing from the other side is just offering more of the same. I mean, think about it. This is not a situation where the Republicans, after having presided over these disastrous policies, said, you know what, we should go reflect for a while. We should go off into the desert and kind of think through, boy, we really messed up. [*Laughter*] Maybe we should come up with some new ideas to see if we can plot a new direction for the party. That's not what they're offering. They are offering the exact same policies that you rejected in 2006, that you rejected in 2008, because you knew they weren't working.

Think about it. I mean, they've said as much. People have asked them, "Well, what are you going to do different this time?" "Nothing. We want to go back to what we were doing." If you're a Wall Street banker or an insurance company or an oil company like BP, you get to play by your own rules. If you have special interests in Washington that don't like oversight, we're going to give you some breaks, maybe we'll give you some more tax cuts, all at the expense of middle class families and at the expense of the country as a whole.

That's why we've got a record deficit and the weakest economy since the Great Depression. And I bring this up not because I want to relitigate the past; I just don't want us to relive the past. I don't want us to relive the past.

And what the other side is basically counting on right now is amnesia. [*Laughter*] That's basically what they're counting on. It's as if they drove a car into the ditch and then we had to put on our boots and go down there in the mud, and we've been pushing and shoving. And they've been standing aside and watching us and saying, "You're not pushing right"— [*laughter*]"you're not pushing fast enough." You know, they're drinking on a Slurpee or something and— [*laughter*]"No, no."

So we're huffing and puffing, and we finally get this car out of the ditch, finally have it on level ground. We're moving forward. And they turn to us and say, "We want the keys." [*Laughter*] Well, you can't have the keys back. You don't know how to drive. [*Laughter*] You got us into the ditch. You can get in the backseat if you want.

If you want to make your car go forward, what do you do? You put it in "D." [*Laughter*] If you want it going backwards, what do you do? You put it in "R." [*Laughter*] That's not an accident.

They can't have the keys back. We don't mind them hitching a ride. [*Laughter*] But we're not going to keep on doing the same things that got us into this mess. That's the choice in this election: Do we go back to the policies of the past, or do we keep moving forward—the policies that are getting us out of this mess?

And the America I believe in, it always moves forward. The America we believe in is a country that rewards hard work instead of greed, an America that rewards responsibility instead of recklessness. We did not become the most prosperous nation on Earth by letting special interests run wild. We did it by investing in people who've always built this country from the ground up: workers and middle class families and small-business owners and responsible entrepreneurs. We did it by outworking and outeducating and outcompeting the rest of the world. That's what we did, and that's what we need to do again.

Other countries are out there, they're competing, they're fighting for the jobs of the future—China, India, Germany, South Korea. And let me tell you, Milwaukee, the United States of America does not play for second place. We play for first place. We are going to rebuild this economy and we're going to rebuild it better and stronger than it was before. And

at that heart of that strategy will be three powerful words: "Made in America." We are going to make things right here in the United States of America and sell them all around the world.

Our choice in this election is between policies that encourage job creation in America and policies that encourage job creation someplace else. So instead of giving tax breaks to companies that ship jobs overseas, we want to cut taxes for small-business owners who create jobs right here in the United States of America.

We want to jump-start a homegrown clean energy industry. I don't want to see new solar panels and wind turbines and electric cars manufactured someplace else. I want to see them stamped with "Made in America," by American workers. We're investing in a 21st-century infrastructure, not just new roads and bridges, but faster Internet access and high-speed railroads, projects that can lead to hundreds of thousands of new private sector jobs.

And these ideas shouldn't be Democratic or Republican ideas. They are commonsense ideas. And yet most of the Republicans in Congress voted no on just about every one of these policies. Do you remember when I was running, we had a little slogan: "Yes we can." These guys' slogan is, "No we can't." [*Laughter*] No on closing loopholes for companies that ship jobs overseas; no on the tax cuts for small businesses; no on the clean energy jobs; no on the railroad and highway projects.

Just this weekend, the Republican leader in the Senate said—this is a quote from the Republican leader in the Senate—"I wish we had been able to obstruct more." Obstruct more? Is that even possible? [*Laughter*]

So apparently, that's their plan for the future: No, we can't. Clean energy? No, we can't. Health care? No, we can't. Wall Street reform? No, we can't.

Think about this. We had the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, almost resulted in a complete meltdown; 8 million jobs lost. And when we try to repair the system to maintain innovation in the financial system, but to make sure that people have some idea what kind of mortgage they're buying or what kind of credit card interest is being charged, or making sure that if one bank goes down, taxpayers don't have to bail it out in order to ensure that the whole system goes down—they said no.

That kind of politicking they might think serves them for the next election. But that's not why Tom is running. That's not why I'm President. That's not why you're here. We're not here for the next election. We are here for the next generation. That is our priority, to think about the future, and that's the difference in this election. That's the choice in this election.

On issue after issue, the Republicans in Congress have sided with corporate special interests over middle class families. A few weeks ago, the Republican leader of the House was asked what his jobs plan was if he took control of Congress next year. You know what he said? "My number-one priority is repealing health care reform." That's his jobs plan—[*laughter*]—not his health care plan, his jobs plan.

Now, this is reform that finally prevents insurers from denying or dropping coverage because of an illness, reform that cuts taxes for small-business owners who cover their employees, so they're now getting a—35 percent of the premiums they're paying for their employees they're now getting a tax break for. It allows young adults to stay on their parents' coverage until they're 26. It lowers the price of prescription drugs for our seniors. It's going to lower the cost of health care for every American. The actuaries just reported 2 weeks ago that this is going to extend the life of Medicare, making it more secure for the next generation.

Now, I'm not sure how reform will create jobs, except for insurance executives who deny your claims. But I do know this—I got a letter a few weeks ago from a man in New Hampshire. In March, his wife was diagnosed with a serious form of cancer. They had no health insurance because her cancer was classified as a preexisting condition. Denied coverage by every insurance company they tried, they couldn't afford coverage on the individual market. But she desperately needed treatment. They had no idea what to do. And because reform finally passed, she now has health insurance. Because reform passed, she is now getting treatment. For the first time in history, a preexisting illness will not prevent you from getting covered.

That's the law you want to repeal? They're siding with the insurance companies who want to go back to the days when they could drop that woman from coverage or deny that woman coverage. But we can't afford to go backward. We need to move this country forward.

Same thing with the financial system: We can't go back to a status quo that almost brought this country to its knees. We've got to move forward so that in fact you now know what credit card companies are charging you for interest, and mortgage companies can't steer you to the more expensive interest rate on your mortgage, and there will not be taxpayer bailouts.

They say they want to repeal this. That can't be a strategy for the future. That's not what we're fighting for. That will not help middle class families across America. That's not going to help put people back to work. That should be something that we should get the parties to agree to.

The same thing is true on clean energy. And the same thing is true on equal pay for equal work. And the same thing is true for not having tobacco companies market to children. These are commonsense ideas. Democrats and Republicans across the country should be able to support it. But we've got folks in Washington who are more concerned with the next election than they are with the next generation.

So I know that Tom is going to have a tough race. Everybody is going to have a tough race across this country because we're going through tough times. But I just want everybody here, when you're talking to your friends, your neighbors, your coworkers, constantly ask the question, who do you think is fighting for you? Who is on your side?

When we had this disaster in the Gulf—thankfully, now we've capped the well, but a lot of people have been harmed. I just came back from there. You got folks who may have lost 50 percent of their revenues, if they're a small business; fishermen who put everything they had into the fishing season and suddenly they were without any customers. And we saw that happening, and we said, you know what, we're going to talk to BP, and we are going to make sure that BP meets their obligations and their claims. And we structured a \$20 billion fund so that we could assure that all those fishermen and small-business people and people who had lost their jobs that they would be taken care of. And the leading Republican on the Energy Committee, who would be in charge of energy if the Republicans took Congress, he apologized to BP—apologized to BP. He said, "You know what, this \$20 billion fund is a 'shakedown.'" I think he called it a "Chicago-style shakedown." [Laughter] This is somebody who could be running our energy policy if the other party takes over. He wasn't apologizing to all those folks who had been affected because BP had caused this accident. He was apologizing to them.

That can't be the kind of leadership that we need going into the 21st century. We can't go backwards. We have to move forward. That's what's at stake in this election. If we give them the keys to this economy, they are going to drive it right back into the ditch. And riding

shotgun will be the big banks and the insurance companies and the oil companies and every special interest under the Sun.

And I want to be very clear here: I want businesses in this country to succeed. And the vast majority of folks out here who are running a business, they are doing what's right by their communities and their workers. And I want to do everything we can to help you grow and to prosper and hire more employees. We just came back from a company that's building advanced batteries right here in this region, hiring more employees, and we are giving them all the help we can.

But I don't think it's antibusiness to say, we should make sure an oil rig is safe before we start drilling. I don't think it's antibusiness to say that Wall Street banks should play the same—play by the same rules as everybody else. I don't think it's antibusiness to say that insurance companies shouldn't prevent that woman in New Hampshire from getting the care she needs because she's got cancer. We can't go back to an attitude that says, "What's good for me is good enough." We've got to start asking, what's good for America? What's best for all of our businesses? What's best for all of our people? That's what we do in this country. We move forward as one people and as one nation, not just a few of us, but all of us.

A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to visit a Chrysler plant in Detroit. Now, this is a place that's been hit harder by recession than almost anywhere else in the country. The auto industry alone lost hundreds of thousands of jobs in the year before I took office. Obviously, some of those jobs were lost here in Wisconsin. We had to make a very difficult decision when I was President about whether to walk away from U.S. automakers or help them get back on their feet. And we decided we could not walk away from up to a million jobs and an iconic industry that symbolizes the rise of American manufacturing. And so we told the automakers, we'll give you some temporary assistance, but you've got to restructure your plants so they can finally compete in the 21st century.

Now, most of the "No, we can't" crowd in Washington didn't agree with that decision. And let's face it: It wasn't that popular in the polls. But today, all three American automakers are operating a profit for the first time in over 5 years. They've had the strongest job growth in more than 10 years. All across the Midwest, folks are heading back to factories and building better cars, more energy-efficient cars.

And at the plant I visited, 14 of these workers at this Chrysler plant had just won the lottery. [*Laughter*] Now, you'd think that most of them would just kick back and retire after that. They could have cashed out. They could have walked away. But it turns out most of them, they're going to work every day. The man who bought the winning ticket is a guy named William Shanteau. He decided to take the money and buy his wife one of the Jeep Grand Cherokees that he had helped to build. And then he went out and bought a bunch of American flags for his hometown, because he loves his country. And he keeps on showing up to work every day, because he loves the company he works for and he loves his coworkers.

And I—when I heard that story, I just wanted to say to all the naysayers in Washington, don't bet against the American worker. Don't lose faith in the American people, because the American people never lose faith in America. We do not give up. We do not quit. We do not fear the future. We shape the future. That's part of what this election is about.

The other side wants you to be afraid of the future. But in times of trial and hardship, we don't give in to fear. We don't give in to division. We move forward. We recapture the ingenuity and optimism of the most dynamic country on Earth. That's how we made the 20th

century the American century. That's how we're going to make the 21st century the American century.

And as long as I have the privilege of being your President, I'm going to keep fighting alongside you to reach that better day. And if you give Tom Barrett a chance, he's going to make you proud as Governor, fighting for you to reach that better day.

But we're going to need you out there each and every day. Don't give in to fear. Let's reach for hope. Don't believe, "No, we can't." I believe, yes, we can.

Thank you, Milwaukee. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1 p.m. at U.S. Cellular Arena. In his remarks, he referred to Senate Minority Leader Addison M. "Mitch" McConnell; House Minority Leader John A. Boehner; Rep. Joe L. Barton; and Lisa Shanteau, wife of William Shanteau, Chrysler Jefferson North Assembly Plant worker, who purchased the winning June Powerball jackpot ticket in Curtice, OH. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 17.

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Locations: Milwaukee, WI.

Names: Barrett, Thomas M.; Barton, Joe L.; Boehner, John A.; Doyle, James E., Jr.; Doyle, Jessica Laird; Kohl, Herbert H.; McConnell, Addison M. "Mitch"; Moore, Gwendolynne S.; Shanteau, Lisa; Shanteau, William.

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