

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks Following a Cabinet Meeting

November 4, 2010

Hello, everybody. I just want to make a few quick remarks to expand on some things that I said yesterday. Obviously, Tuesday was a big election. I've congratulated the Republicans and consoled some of our Democratic friends about the results. And I think it's clear that the voters sent a message, which is, they want us to focus on the economy and jobs and moving this country forward. They're concerned about making sure that taxpayer money is not wasted, and they want to change the tone here in Washington, where the two parties are coming together and focusing on the people's business, as opposed to scoring political points.

I just had a meeting with my Cabinet and key staff to let them know that we have to take that message to heart and make a sincere and consistent effort to try to change how Washington operates. And the folks around this table have done extraordinary work in their agencies. They have cooperated consistently with Congress. I think they are interested in bipartisan ideas. And so they are going to be integral in helping me to root out waste in Government, make our agencies more efficient, and generate more ideas so that we can put the American people back to work.

Now, at the same time, obviously, what's going to be critically important over the coming months is creating a better working relationship between this White House and the congressional leadership that's coming in, as well as the congressional leadership that carries over from the previous Congress. And so I want everybody to know that I have already called Mitch McConnell, John Boehner, Harry Reid, and Nancy Pelosi to invite them to a meeting here at the White House in the first week of the lame duck on November 18. This is going to be a meeting in which I want us to talk substantively about how we can move the American people's agenda forward. It's not just going to be a photo op. Hopefully, it may spill over into dinner. And the immediate focus is going to be what we need to get done during the lame duck session.

I mentioned yesterday, we have to act in order to assure that middle class families don't see a big tax spike because of how the Bush tax cuts have been structured. It is very important that we extend those middle class tax provisions to hold middle class families harmless.

But there are a whole range of other economic issues that have to be addressed: unemployment insurance for folks who are still out there looking for work; business extenders, which are essentially provisions to encourage businesses to invest here in the United States, and if we don't have those, we're losing a very important tool for us to be able to increase business investment and increase job growth over the coming year. We've got to provide businesses some certainty about what their tax landscape's going to look like, and we've got to provide families certainty. That's critical to maintain our recovery.

I should mention that in addition to those economic issues, there are some things during the lame duck that relate to foreign policy that are going to be very important for us to deal with, and I'll make mention of one in particular, and that's the START Treaty. We have negotiated with the Russians significant reductions in our nuclear arms. This is something that traditionally has received strong bipartisan support. We've got people like George Shultz, who helped to organize arms control treaties with the Russians back when it was the Soviet Union, who have come out forcefully in favor of this.

This is not a traditionally Democratic or Republican issue, but rather, a issue of American national security. And I am hopeful that we can get that done before we leave and send a strong signal to Russia that we are serious about reducing nuclear arsenals, but also send a signal to the world that we're serious about nonproliferation. We've made great progress when it comes to sending a message to Iran that they are isolated internationally, in part because people have seen that we are serious about taking our responsibilities when it comes to nonproliferation, and that has to continue.

So there is going to be a whole range of work that needs to get done in a relatively short period of time, and I'm looking forward to having a conversation with the leadership about some agenda items that they may be concerned about.

Last point I'll make is that I've also invited the newly elected Democratic and Republican Governors here to the White House on December 2 because I think it's a terrific opportunity to hear from them, folks who are working at the State and local levels, about what they're seeing, what ideas they think Washington needs to be paying more attention to.

A lot of times things are a little less ideological when you get Governors together, because they've got very practical problems that they've got to solve in terms of how do they make sure that roads and bridges are funded and how do they make sure that schools stay open and teachers stay on the job. That kind of nuts-and-bolts stuff, I think, oftentimes yields the kind of commonsense approach that the American people, I think, are looking for right now.

So, in sum, we've got a lot of work to do. People are still catching their breath from the election. The dust is still settling. But the one thing I'm absolutely certain of is that the American people don't want us just standing still and they don't want us engaged in gridlock. They want us to do the people's business, partly because they understand that the world is not standing still.

I'm going to be leaving at the—tomorrow for India, and the primary purpose is to take a bunch of U.S. companies and open up markets so that we can sell in Asia, in some of the fastest growing markets in the world, and we can create jobs here in the United States of America. And my hope is, is that we've got some specific announcements that show the connection between what we're doing overseas and what happens here at home when it comes to job growth and economic growth.

But the bottom line is, is that all around the world, countries are moving. They are serious about competing. They are serious about competing with us not just on manufacturing, but on services. They're competing with us when it comes to educational attainment, when it comes to scientific discovery.

And so we can't afford 2 years of just squabbling. What we need to do is make sure that everybody is pulling together, Democrats and Republicans and Independents, folks at the Federal level and the State levels, private sector with the public sector, to make sure that America retains its competitiveness, retains its leadership in the world. And that's something that I'm very much looking forward to helping to be a part of.

So thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:40 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former Secretary of State George P. Shultz. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Cabinet meetings.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: McConnell, Addison M. "Mitch"; Boehner, John A.; Bush, George W.; Pelosi, Nancy; Reid, Harry; Shultz, George P.

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