

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

**Remarks at the Opening Session of the White House Rural Economic Forum
in Peosta, Iowa**

August 16, 2011

Thank you so much. Well, it is wonderful to be back in Iowa, and thank you for arranging perfect weather these last couple of days. *[Laughter]* I have just been having a great time.

I want to first of all make just a few acknowledgments. Richard Avenarius, who is the mayor of Peosta, please—where are you, Mr. Mayor? Well, he was here. *[Laughter]* Give him a round of applause anyway.

This person I know is here—and I want to thank Northeast Iowa Community College for hosting us—Dr. Liang Wee is here, interim president.

I've got a number of members of my Cabinet who are here. All of them do outstanding work day in, day out. So I couldn't be prouder of them. First of all, this guy you should be a little familiar with because he used to be the Governor of this great State, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack; Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar; Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood; Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Shaun Donovan; and the Small Business Administrator Karen Mills.

Well, this is an outstanding crowd, and I don't want to stand in the way of a lot of good work that's going to be done, so I'm going to just make some brief remarks at the top. We've got small-business owners here. We have farmers. We have ranchers, public servants, clean energy entrepreneurs, and community organizations from all across rural America. And I'm here because I want to hear from you and my Cabinet wants to hear from you.

There are two things that I know for sure: America is going to come back from this recession stronger than before. That I'm convinced of; I believe that. And I'm also convinced that comeback isn't going to be driven by Washington. It's going to be driven by folks here in Iowa. It's going to begin in the classrooms of community colleges like this one. It's going to start on the ranchlands and farms of the Midwest, in the workshops of basement inventors, in the storefronts of small-business owners.

And that's why I'm here today. Obviously, we're going through tough times right now. I don't have to tell you that. A lot of folks are looking for work. Even if you have a job or a small business or a farm, you're maybe getting by with fewer customers or making do with fewer shifts or less money in tips. And for a lot of families in rural parts of the country, these challenges aren't new. For a long time—a decade, maybe longer—you've known what it means to face hardship.

But we also know that while times may be tough, our people are tougher. You know how to make it through a hard season. You know how to look out for each other in the face of drought or tornadoes or disasters, looking out for each other until we reach a brighter day.

And that ethic, that kind of honor and self-discipline and integrity, those are the values that we associate with small towns like this one. Those are the values that built America. And while we've taken some hits, this country still has the best workers, the greatest farms, the top scientists and universities, the most successful businesses and entrepreneurs in the world.

So as I've been saying over the last couple days, there's nothing wrong with this country. We'll get through this moment of challenge. The only question is if, as a nation, we're going to do what it takes to grow this economy and put people back to work right now and can we get our politics to match up with the decency of our people.

The question is if we're going to harness the potential to create jobs and opportunities that exist here in Iowa and all across America. We know what's possible if we're willing to fight for our future and to put aside the politics of the short term and try to get something done. Already this administration has helped nearly 10,000 rural businesses and 35,000 small and medium-sized farms and ranches to get the financing that they need. That's already happened. And that means a restaurant owner can bust down a wall and set up some more tables. It means a family farm can buy a new piece of equipment to get more product to market. And that puts people to work today.

Now, just as the interstate highways knitted the country together 50 years ago, we've also got to do some new things to meet the challenges of the 21st century. We need to expand the reach of broadband, high-speed Internet to 7 million more people and hundreds of thousands of businesses in rural communities. And by taking that step, it's making it possible for folks to take classes and train for new jobs online. It's helping people sell goods, not just down the street, but across the country and around the world. We've invested in clean energy, like advanced biofuels, so that we're moving from an economy that runs on foreign oil to one that runs on homegrown America energy. That's a whole new industry that's taking root here in Iowa and across rural America.

But the rural economy is still not as strong as it could be. That's why I created a Rural Council to look for ways to promote jobs and opportunity right now. And this council has come up with a number of proposals. And we're not wasting time in taking up these proposals; we want to put them to work right now.

So today I'm announcing that we're ramping up our efforts to get capital to small businesses in rural areas. We're doubling the commitment we've already made through key small-business lending programs. We're going to make it easier for people in rural areas looking for work to find out about companies that are hiring. We're going to do more to speed the development of next-generation biofuels, and we're going to promote renewable energy and conservation. We're going to help smaller local hospitals in communities like this one to recruit doctors and the nurses that they need. And those are just some of the things that we're already announcing today. The reason we brought you all together is because I'm looking forward to hearing from you about what else we can do to jump-start the economy here in rural America.

We want to leave no stone unturned when it comes to strengthening this economy. And we're going to be able to do a lot of stuff administratively. All the proposals we're making today didn't require new laws; it just means that we're doing things smarter, we're eliminating duplication, we're allocating resources to places that we know are really making a difference.

But we could do even more if Congress is willing to get in the game. There are bipartisan ideas, commonsense ideas that have traditionally been supported by Democrats and Republicans that will put more money in your pockets, that will put our people to work, that will allow us to deal with the legacy of debt that hangs over our economy.

I want to cut the payroll tax again to help families make ends meet. That's meant an extra thousand dollars in the pockets of typical American families. That means more customers for

your business, more buyers of your products. I want to pass a road construction bill to put tens of thousands of people to work all across America.

We've got young people returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with incredible skills: 25-year-olds who have led platoons, 26-year-olds handling equipment that costs hundreds of millions of dollars. Well, let's connect them to businesses that can use their talents right now.

We should pass trade deals that will level the playing field for American companies. And no folks benefit more than rural Americans when it comes to our trade. That's the reason that our agricultural sector is doing incredibly well and that has spillover effects, ripple effects throughout the economy here.

But it also benefits manufacturing. We've got folks in America driving Kias and Hyundais. I want to see folks in Korea driving Fords and Chryslers and Chevys. I want to sell goods all over the world that are stamped with three words: "Made in America."

And all of these proposals will make a difference for rural communities. The only thing that is holding us back is our politics. The only thing that's preventing us from passing the bills I just mentioned is the refusal of a faction in Congress to put country ahead of party. And that has to stop. Our economy cannot afford it. Our economy can't afford it.

So I don't care whether you're a Democrat or Republican, Independent, if you're not registered with any party. I want to enlist your help. I need your help sending a message to Congress that it's time to put the politics aside and get something done.

The folks here in Iowa do the right thing. I've been traveling through these small towns and talking to folks, sitting down at diners. And you listen to people, they take such pride doing the right thing: taking care of their families, working hard, saving for the future, living within their means, giving back to their communities.

You do your part. You meet your obligations. Well, it's time Washington acted as responsibly as you do every single day. It's past time.

We've got a lot of work to do, and the only way it will get done is if Democrats and Republicans put country ahead of party and put the next generation ahead of the next election. And that's what I'm fighting for. That's why I'm out here visiting communities like this one and Decorah and small towns in Minnesota and Illinois.

I'm convinced; I've seen it. When we come together, there's no stopping this country. There is no stopping it. We can create opportunities for training and education and good careers in rural America so young people don't feel like they've got to leave their hometowns to find work. We can strengthen the middle class, restore that sense of economic security that's been missing for a lot of people for way too long. We can push through this period of economic hardship, and we can get to a better place. That's why we're here together. That's what this forum is all about.

So I appreciate all of your participation. I expect great ideas coming out of these breakout sessions. I'm going to join a couple of them. Let's get to work. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:05 p.m. at Northeast Iowa Community College.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : White House Rural Economic Forum in Peosta, IA.

Locations: Peosta, IA.

Names: Avenarius, Richard; Donovan, Shaun L.S.; LaHood, Raymond H.; Mills, Karen G.; Salazar, Kenneth L.; Vilsack, Thomas J.; Wee, Liang C.

Subjects: Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Agriculture : Food markets and prices; Agriculture, Department of : Secretary; Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Strengthening efforts; Business and industry : Banks and financial institutions :: Loans to small businesses, increase; Business and industry : Small businesses :: Promotion efforts; Commerce, international : Free and fair trade; Commerce, international : U.S. exports :: Expansion; Communications : Broadband technology; Congress : Bipartisanship; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Household incomes, decline; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Elections : 2012 Presidential and congressional elections; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: Promotion efforts; Energy : Biofuels and ethanol; Energy : Domestic sources; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Housing and Urban Development, Department of : Secretary; Interior, Department of : Secretary; Iowa : President's visit; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Small Business Administration : Administrator; Taxation : Payroll tax cut; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts; Transportation, Department of : Secretary; Veterans Affairs, Department of : Education and job training assistance; White House Office : White House Rural Council; White House Office : White House Rural Economic Forum.

DCPD Number: DCPD201100571.