

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks at Hilltop Basic Resources, Inc., River Terminal in Cincinnati, Ohio
September 22, 2011

The President. Hello, Cincinnati! Well, it is good to see all of you. It is good—it's good to be back in Cincinnati. I have to say, I drove by the Bengals's practice, and I was scouting out some plays in case they play the Bears. [*Laughter*] Did I hear somebody boo the Bears?

Audience members. Boo! [*Laughter*]

The President. We've got some folks I just want to make sure are acknowledged here today. First of all, the Secretary of Transportation, Ray LaHood's in the house. Give him a round of applause. We've got the mayor of the great city of Cincinnati, Mark Mallory is here. We've got the mayor of Covington, Mayor Denny Bowman. Senator Rand Paul is here.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. We—Rand's is going to be supporting bridges, so we got to—[*applause*]. And we've got Congressman John Yarmuth in the house.

Now, it is good to be back. I was just in Columbus a little while ago, and I figured I couldn't get away with not giving Cincinnati a little bit of love.

I want to thank the good folks at Hilltop Concrete for having us here today. I especially want to thank Ron for his introduction.

Companies like Hilltop, construction companies, have been hit harder by this economic crisis than almost any other industry in America. And there are millions of construction workers who are still out there looking for a job. They're ready to work, but things have been a little tough. Now, that doesn't mean that there is not plenty of construction waiting to get done in this country.

Behind us stands the Brent Spence Bridge. It's located on one of the busiest trucking routes in North America. It sees about a hundred and fifty thousand vehicles every single day. And it's in such poor condition that it's been labeled "functionally obsolete." Think about that: functionally obsolete. That doesn't sound good, does it?

Audience members. No!

Audience member. That's kind of like John Boehner.

The President. It's safe to—[*laughter*]—it's safe to drive on, but it was not designed to accommodate today's traffic, which can stretch out for a mile. Shipping companies try to have their trucks avoid the bridge. Of course, that only ends up costing them more money as well.

The thing is there are bridges and roads and highways like that throughout the region. A major bridge that connects Kentucky and Indiana just closed down for safety reasons. Another aging bridge that crosses over the Ohio River in Ironton could be replaced right now. There are rail stations in Cleveland and Toledo in desperate need of repair. And the same is true in cities all across America. It makes your commute longer. It costs our billions—our businesses billions of dollars. They could be moving products faster if they had better transportation routes. And in some cases, it's not safe.

Now, we used to have the best infrastructure in the world here in America. We're the country that built the intercontinental railroad, the Interstate Highway System. We built the Hoover Dam. We built the Grand Central station. So how can we now sit back and let China build the best railroads and let Europe build the best highways and have Singapore build a nicer airport at a time when we've got millions of unemployed construction workers out there just ready to get on the job, ready to do the work to rebuilding America?

So, Cincinnati, we are better than that. We're smarter than that. And that's why I sent Congress the "American Jobs Act" 10 days ago. This bill is not that complicated. It's a bill that would put people back to work rebuilding America: repairing our roads, repairing our bridges, repairing our schools. It would lead to jobs for concrete workers like the ones here at Hilltop, jobs for construction workers and masons, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, architects, engineers, ironworkers—put folks back to work.

There is work to be done, and there are workers ready to do it. So let's tell Congress to pass this jobs bill right away.

Audience members. Pass this bill! Pass this bill! Pass this bill!

The President. Pass this bill! [Laughter] Pass the bill!

Tell them to pass the jobs bill, and not only will we start rebuilding America, but we can also put thousands of teachers back to work.

I was with the President of South Korea—I was up at the United Nations. We were doing a bunch of stuff. And he's told me in the past—I've asked him, I said, what's your biggest challenge? He says, oh, education. I said, well, what are you dealing with? He said, well, you know what, we're hiring so many teachers we can barely keep up, because we know that if we're going to compete in the future, we've got to have the best teachers. And we've got to have our kids in school longer. And we've got to make sure that they're learning math and science.

Well, while they're hiring teachers in droves, what are we doing? We're laying off teachers. It makes no sense in this new global economy where our young people's success is going to depend on the kind of education that they can get. So for us to be laying off teachers doesn't make sense for our kids, it doesn't make sense for us, it doesn't make sense for our economy.

Pass this jobs bill and put teachers back in the classroom where they belong.

Audience members. Pass this bill! Pass this bill! Pass this bill!

The President. They need to go and pass it.

Tell Congress to pass this jobs bill, and companies will get tax credit for hiring America's veterans. We've been through a decade of war now. Almost 2 million people have served. And think about it. They're suspending their careers, they're leaving their families, they're putting themselves in harm way, all to protect us. The last thing they should have to do is fight for a job when they come home. And if we pass this jobs bill, it makes it easier for employers to hire those veterans. That's why we need to tell Congress to do what? To pass the bill.

Audience members. Pass this bill! Pass this bill! Pass this bill!

The President. The "American Jobs Act" will cut taxes for the typical working family by \$1,500 next year. It will cut taxes for every small business in America. It will give an extra tax

cut to every small-business owner who either hires more workers or raises those workers' wages. How many people here would like a raise?

And we know that most small businesses are the creators of new jobs. We've got a lot of folks in Congress who love to say how they're behind America's jobs creators. Well, if that's the case, then you should be passing this bill, because that's what this bill is all about, is helping small businesses all across America.

Everything in this jobs bill has been supported in the past by Republicans and Democrats. Everything in this jobs bill is paid for. The idea for a big boost in construction is supported by the AFL-CIO, but it's also supported by the Chamber of Commerce. Those two don't get along on much, but they agree we should rebuild America.

And by the way, thanks to the reforms that we've put into place, when we start rebuilding America, we're going to change how business is done. No more earmarks. No more boondoggles. No more bridges to nowhere. We're going to cut the redtape that prevents some of these construction projects from getting started as quickly as possible. And we'll set up an independent fund to attract private dollars and issue loans based on two criteria: how badly is a construction project needed and how much good will it do for the community. Those are the only things we should be thinking about. Not politics. And by the way, that's an idea that's supported by a Massachusetts Democrat and a Texas Republican. It's a good idea.

So my question is, what's Congress waiting for? Why is it taking so long? Now, the bridge behind us just happens to connect the State that's home to the Speaker of the House——

Audience members. Boo!

The President. ——with the home State of the Republican leader in the Senate.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. Now, that's just a coincidence. [*Laughter*] It's purely accidental that that happened. [*Laughter*] But part of the reason I came here is because Mr. Boehner and Mr. McConnell, those are the two most powerful Republicans in Government. They can either kill this jobs bill or they can help pass this jobs bill. And I know these men care about their States. They care about businesses, they care about workers here. I can't imagine that the Speaker wants to represent a State where nearly one in four bridges are classified as substandard—one in four. I know that when Senator McConnell visited the closed bridge in Kentucky, he said that "roads and bridges are not partisan in Washington." That's great. I know that Paul Ryan, the Republican in charge of the budget process, recently said that "you can't deny that infrastructure does create jobs." That's what he said.

Well, if that's the case, there's no reason for Republicans in Congress to stand in the way of more construction projects. There's no reason to stand in the way of more jobs.

Mr. Boehner, Mr. McConnell, help us rebuild this bridge. Help us rebuild America. Help us put construction workers back to work. Pass this bill.

Audience members. Pass this bill! Pass this bill! Pass this bill!

The President. Let's pass the bill.

Audience members. Pass this bill! Pass this bill! Pass this bill!

The President. Now, some folks in Congress, they say, well, we don't like how it's paid for. Well, it's paid for as part of my larger plan to pay down our debt. And that plan makes some

additional cuts in spending. We already cut a trillion dollars in spending. This makes an additional hundreds of billions of dollars in cuts in spending, but it also asks the wealthiest Americans and the biggest corporations to pay their fair share of taxes.

Now, that should not be too much to ask. And by the way, it wouldn't kick in until 2013. So when you hear folks saying, "Oh, we shouldn't be raising taxes right now," nobody's talking about raising taxes right now. We're talking about cutting taxes right now. But it does mean that there's a long-term plan, and part of it involves everybody doing their fair share.

Now, this isn't to punish success. What's great about this country is our belief that anybody can make it. If you're willing to put in the sweat, if you're willing to roll up your sleeves, if you're willing to work hard, you've got a good idea, you're out there taking a risk, God bless you. You can make millions, you can make billions of dollars in America. This is the land of opportunity. That's great. All I'm saying is if you've done well—I've done well—then you should do a little something to give something back. You should want to see the country that provided you with this opportunity to be successful and be able to provide opportunity for the young people who are going to be up—coming up behind you.

And all I'm saying is that everything should be fair. You know, the—you learn the idea of fairness when you're 2, 3 years old, right? You're in the sandbox, and you don't want to let somebody play with your truck, and—[laughter]—your mama or your daddy go up, and they say, "No, hon, it's not fair, you've got to share." Isn't that what they say? Things have to be fair. So all I'm saying is that Warren Buffett's secretary should not be paying a lower tax rate on her income than Warren Buffett. That doesn't make any sense. A construction worker who's making 50 or 60 grand a year shouldn't be paying higher tax rates than the guy who's making \$50 million a year. And that's how it's working right now. Because they get all these loopholes and tax breaks that you don't get.

So for me to say let's close those loopholes, let's eliminate those tax breaks, and let's make sure that everybody's paying their fair share, there's nothing wrong with that.

Now, this is about priorities. It's about making choices. If we just had all kinds of money and everybody was working and we hadn't gone through the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, then maybe we wouldn't have to make choices. But right now we've got to make some choices. We've got to decide what our priorities are. If we want to pay for this jobs plan and close the deficit and invest in our infrastructure and make sure we've got the best education system in the world, the money's got to come from some place. Would you rather that the oil companies get to keep their tax loopholes?

Audience members. No!

The President. Or would you rather make sure that we're hiring thousands of construction workers to rebuild America?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. Would you rather keep in place special tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires?

Audience members. No!

The President. Or would you say, let's get teachers back in the classroom so our children can learn?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. Now, the Republicans, when I talked about this earlier in the week, they said, well, this is class warfare. You know what, if asking a billionaire to pay their fair share of taxes, to pay the same tax rate as a plumber or a teacher, is class warfare, then you know what, I'm a warrior for the middle class. I'm happy to fight for the middle class. I'm happy to fight for working people. Because the only warfare I've seen is the battle against the middle class over the last 10, 15 years.

It's time to build an economy that creates good, middle class jobs in this country. It's time to build an economy that honors the values of hard work and responsibility. It's time to build an economy that lasts. And, Cincinnati, that starts right now. That starts with your help. Maybe some of the people in Congress would rather settle their differences at the ballot box than work together right now. In fact, a while back, Senator McConnell said that his top priority—number-one priority—was to defeat the President. That was his top priority.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. Not jobs, not putting people back to work, not rebuilding America—beating me. Well, I've got news for him and every other Member of Congress who feels the same way. The next election is 14 months away, and I'll be happy to tangle sometime down the road. But the American people right now don't have the luxury of waiting to solve our problems for another 14 months. A lot of folks are living paycheck to paycheck. A lot of folks are just barely getting by. They need us to get to work right now. They need us to pass this bill.

So I'm asking all of you, I need everybody here to lift your voices, not just in Cincinnati, but anybody who's watching TV or anybody who's within the range of my voice, I want everybody to lift up their voices. I want you to call. I want you to e-mail. I want you to tweet. I want you to fax. I want you to visit. If you want, write a letter. It's been a while. [Laughter] I want you to tell your congressperson that the time for gridlock and games-playing is over. Tell them you want to create jobs, so pass this bill.

If you want construction workers rebuilding America, pass this bill. If you want teachers back in the classrooms, pass this bill. If you want to cut taxes for middle class families, pass this bill. If you want to help small businesses, what do you do?

Audience members. Pass this bill!

The President. If you want veterans to share in the opportunities of this country, what should you do?

Audience members. Pass this bill!

The President. Now is the time to act. Because we are not a people that just sit back and wait for things to happen. We go ahead and make things happen. We're tougher than the times we live in. We are bigger than the politics that we've been seeing these last few months. Let's meet this moment. Let's get back to work. Let's show the world once again why America is the greatest nation on Earth.

God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:55 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to West Harrison, IN, resident Ron King; President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea; Sens. John F. Kerry and Kathryn A. "Kay" Bailey Hutchison; and Warren E. Buffett, chief executive officer and chairman, Berkshire Hathaway Inc.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Hilltop Basic Resources, Inc., River Terminal in Cincinnati, OH.

Locations: Cincinnati, OH.

Names: Boehner, John A.; Bowman, Denny; Buffett, Warren E.; Hutchison, Kathryn A. "Kay" Bailey; Kerry, John F.; King, Ron; LaHood, Raymond H.; Lee Myung-bak; Mallory, Mark; McConnell, A. Mitchell; Paul, Randal H.; Ryan, Paul D.; Yarmuth, John A.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Budget, Federal : Government programs, spending reductions; Business and industry : Construction industry, decline; Business and industry : Small businesses :: Economic impact; Business and industry : Small businesses :: Hiring incentives; Business and industry : Small businesses :: Promotion efforts; Chamber of Commerce, U.S.; Congress : Earmark reform; Congress : House of Representatives :: Speaker; Congress : Senate :: Minority leader; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : School improvement and renovation; Education : Teachers; Elections : 2012 Presidential and congressional elections; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Labor issues : Unions :: American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO); Ohio : Hilltop Basic Resources, Inc., River Terminal in Cincinnati; Ohio : President's visit; South Korea : President; Sports : Football; Taxation : Tax Code, reform; Taxation : Tax relief; Transportation : Highway system, modernization efforts; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts; Transportation : Mass transit and rail infrastructure, improvement efforts; Transportation, Department of : Secretary; Veterans : Hiring incentives.

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