

Remarks at General Motors Orion Assembly Plant in Lake Orion, Michigan
October 14, 2011

President Obama. Hello, Detroit! Hello! Everybody, please have a seat. Have a seat. It is great to be back in the Motor City. I notice the mood's a little brighter on this particular visit. [*Laughter*] I'd like to think it's because everybody is excited about the Korea Free Trade Agreement, but I suspect it might just have a little bit to do with your Lions beating up on my Bears. All right, all right, all right. [*Laughter*] Don't get carried away now. [*Laughter*] Not to mention your Tigers hanging in there last night.

As you can see, President Lee is a pretty good politician. [*Laughter*] He knows how to get on your good side. Today I brought a good friend and one of our closest allies, President Lee of South Korea. Some of you may know, President Lee has got a remarkable story. He grew up a little ways from Detroit, but he embodies that same spirit that Detroit's all about. Through sheer grit and determination, he worked his way from the humblest beginnings. The South Korea of his childhood was an extraordinarily poor country. But he worked his way up, worked his way up, went to school while cleaning streets, and eventually went on to run a Hyundai machinery plant—so he knows a little bit about cars—then the whole company, and ultimately was elected the President of the Republic of Korea. And this is a country that's staged one of the world's greatest economic comebacks that we've ever seen.

So President Lee knows what it's like to go through tough times. He knows what it's like when folks have counted you out. And he knows what it's like to make a big comeback.

So with that, I want to welcome President Lee to Detroit and have him say just a few words.

President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea. Thank you. Folks, I'm a little bit shorter than President Obama, so I'm going to adjust the microphone. [*Laughter*] I hope you'll understand.

Well, first of all, ladies and gentlemen, it's a great pleasure visiting your factory here in Detroit along with one of my closest friends, President Obama.

Well, folks, as you know, the global economy is going through some tough times, and so there's one thing on the minds of both President Obama and I, and that is jobs. It is about creating good, decent jobs, and it is about keeping those jobs. And this is what keeps us awake.

Ladies and gentlemen, before I came here to see you, I just had a brief tour given to me by the members of this factory and I heard about the history, and I also heard about the danger of how this factory was on the brink of being closed. But now, as you can see, we have so many people here, like all of you here working here and earning a good living. And I think more than anyone else here in this factory, I think it's President Obama who's the happiest man to see this factory being so energetic and enthusiastic.

Ladies and gentlemen, it was 3 years ago when I first met with President Obama, and back then I still remember how we talked about a lot of things. And one of the things that was on President Obama's mind was how to revive the U.S. automotive industry. Because we all know that the U.S. automotive industry was, and is, the leader in the world, and President Obama was concerned what he can do to revive Motor City and the United States automotive industry. And we talked a lot about that. And, folks, I know one or—a few things about automobiles

because back when I was in the private sector, I used to build cars myself. So I know a thing or two about automobiles, and I think perhaps this was the reason why President Obama raised this subject. But we talked a lot about how to revive the U.S. automobile industry.

Ladies and gentlemen, President Obama just briefly talked about my past, how I really worked hard throughout my life. And I was once just like you. I was—I did work in factories, and I was also in the boardroom as well, as a CEO of one of the largest companies in Korea. But one thing I learned throughout my experience in my life is this: During times of challenges, when you're faced with difficulties and if you want to create good jobs and maintain these good jobs, there's only one thing and the surest way to do that is for the workers and for the managers to work together. It is about cooperating together, and that is the surest way to ensure good jobs and for you to keep your jobs.

And, ladies and gentlemen, we are here with President Obama because when I was a worker I knew that, more than anything, for all of us to enjoy good life is for all of us to have a good, decent job. And I know how important it is for anyone to have a good, decent job. And the factory here—as I was looking around, I felt once again how important it is for all of us to work together, because I know that 3 years ago, GM Korea and GM Orion, you guys worked together to set up this factory. And today, you are building models here and you're manufacturing cars that 3 years ago—GM Korea and your company has been working together, and that is the reason why I came here, so I can see with my own eyes the good work that all of you are doing here.

Folks, when I was President, as soon as I became President of Korea, I visited GM Korea factory not once, but twice, which was quite unusual for the President of Korea to do so. But I came here today, and as I watch the factory and I took on a tour, I was very, very—and deeply impressed by the way you're operating this factory. I was impressed by the fact that this factory is very proenvironment. You take care of the environment. Also you've adopted the latest IT technology so that efficiency is up. You have the highest standards, and you're building excellent cars here in this factory. And I am confident that this factory is going to continue, and it's going to make good cars, and your lives are going to be good. And I'm sure—and I'm confident in the future.

Lastly, folks, I just want to say one thing before I go. As you know, the KORUS FTA will soon be implemented. I know, folks, that some of you here may think that with the implementation of the KORUS FTA, that somehow your jobs may be exported or go somewhere else. But let me tell you one thing: That is not true. I am here with President Obama today because I want to give this promise to you, and that is that the KORUS FTA will not take away any of your jobs. Rather it will create more jobs for you and your family, and it is going to protect your jobs. And this is the pledge that I give you today.

Soon, folks, Motor City is going to come back again, and it's going to revive its past glory. And I have all the confidence in the world that you are going to do that.

Thank you.

President Obama. Thank you. Give President Lee a big round of applause.

All right. Well, thank you, President Lee.

Thank you, to everybody who has joined us here today. A couple of people I just want to mention. First of all, the CEO of General Motors, Dan Akerson, is here. Where's Dan? There he is. The UAW president, one of the key people who helped make this agreement possible,

that is my dear friend Bob King. And my U.S. Trade Representative, who spent a lot of long nights with his Korean counterpart, Ron Kirk is in the house.

I just want to follow up President Lee's remarks with a few words about what the Korea Free Trade Agreement will mean for American jobs and for the American economy. In the last decade, we became a country that was known for what we bought and what we consumed. And a whole bunch of goods poured in here from all around the world, and we spent a lot of money and took on a lot of debt, in a lot of cases, to buy those goods. But it didn't necessarily produce a lot of jobs here in the United States.

So when I took office, I was determined to rebuild this economy based on what this country has always done best, not just buying and consuming, but building, making things, selling those goods all around the world, stamped with three proud words: Made in America. And that's why one of the first decisions that I made as President was to save the U.S. auto industry from collapse. Now—[*applause*].

There were a lot of politicians who said it wasn't worth the time and wasn't worth the money. In fact, there are some politicians who still say that. Well, they should come tell that to the workers here at Orion.

Because 2 years ago, it looked like this plant was going to have to shut its doors. All these jobs would have been lost. The entire community would have been devastated. And the same was true for communities all across the Midwest. And I refused to let that happen.

So we made a deal with the auto companies. We said if you're willing to retool and restructure, get more efficient, get better, get smarter, then we're going to invest in your future, because we believe in American ingenuity. Most importantly, we believe in American workers.

And today I can stand here and say that the investment paid off. The hundreds of thousands of jobs that have been saved made it worth it. An American auto industry that's more profitable and competitive than it's been in years made it worth it. The taxpayers are being repaid. Plants like this are churning out groundbreaking fuel-efficient cars like the Chevy Sonic, the only one of its kind that's made and sold in the United States of America.

And for folks who haven't tried it, you've got to sit in that car. There's a lot of room in there. [*Laughter*] Felt—even for a pretty tall guy like me, I felt pretty good. They took away the keys, though. Secret Service wouldn't let me—[*laughter*]—I checked in the dash. It wasn't there.

Now, here's the thing. We live in a global economy, and that means most of the potential customers for American companies like GM won't just be here in the United States, they'll be all around the world. And the more goods and services we sell abroad, the more jobs we create here at home.

In fact, every \$1 billion in exports supports thousands of American jobs. And that's why I've set a goal of doubling our exports, and that's a goal that we're on track to meet. That's why we worked with Panama and Colombia, as well as South Korea, to resolve outstanding issues with these trade agreements, and that's why I pushed Congress to pass them as soon as possible.

Now, Korea is one that is critically important, because understand, Korea has 50 million people; it's one of the fastest growing countries in the world. It's one of our closest allies and our closest friends. And—President Lee and I talked about this when we had dinner the other

night—our trade is basically balanced between the United States and Korea. They buy as much stuff from us as they sell to us. And that's how fair and free trade is supposed to be. It's not a one-sided proposition. That's how trade is supposed to be. And I know President Lee doesn't mind me saying this, even though he's a Hyundai guy. *[Laughter]* If Americans can buy Kias and Hyundais from Korea, then I know Koreans should be able to buy some Fords and Chryslers and Chevys that are made right here in the United States of America.

The other thing that happened was—this took a little longer than some people expected because I wasn't going to sign just any trade deal. President Lee wasn't either. We had to work hard to reach an understanding. It was like a scene from a GM dealership, where folks are negotiating about the heated seats and the extended warranty, and you're going back and forth and trying to figure how does it fit together so that it works for everybody. But when all was said and done, President Lee and I walked away with a trade agreement that is a win-win for both countries.

Here in the United States, this trade agreement will support at least 70,000 American jobs. It will increase exports. It will boost our economy by more than our last nine trade agreements combined. And as I said, the good thing is we've got a balanced situation. It's not just a matter of folks sending a bunch of stuff here. Koreans are also buying American products. That's what makes it a win-win.

And by the way, I also held out on sending this agreement to Congress until they promised to renew a law called the TAA—Trade Adjustment Assistance—that helps American workers who've been affected by global competition so that they are able to help transition.

Now, it's because of all these benefits that this trade agreement won the support of business and labor, from automakers and auto workers, from Democrats and Republicans. That doesn't happen very often. And it was good to finally see both parties in Congress come together and pass legislation that is good for the American people, an agreement that will not only build on our strong economic relationship that's been existing for years to come, but also promises, as we've seen at this plant, the capacity for us to exchange ideas and technologies and systems, which will improve productivity on both sides.

Nearly a decade ago, when a Korean business named Daewoo Motors went bankrupt, it was General Motors that stepped in and saved that company, which is now known as GM Korea. And years later, it was the engineers from GM Korea who helped make the Chevy Sonic possible and the collaboration with that company that's helped save this plant and these 17,050 jobs—1,750 jobs.

So on a larger scale, the closer economic ties between the United States and Korea are going to lead to more jobs, more opportunity for both nations. Already, Korean investment—and by the way, it's not just in the auto industry. Already, Korean investment is creating jobs here in Michigan, with LG Chem planning to make lithium and ion batteries in Holland, Michigan, and Hyundai manufacturing suspension modules in Detroit, and Mando opening a new research and development center for brakes and steering in Novi. In Korea, American businesses are going to be pursuing those same investments and opportunities. So it's truly a win-win for everybody involved.

So I just want to say thank you to President Lee for his cooperation and for his leadership. I want to thank the Members of Congress who fought so hard to get this done, especially the delegation from this State. I want to especially thank the people of Detroit for proving that despite all the work that lies ahead, this is a city where a great American industry is coming

back to life and the industries of tomorrow are taking root, and a city where people are dreaming up ways to prove all the skeptics wrong and write the next proud chapter in the Motor City's history.

And that's why I came here today. Because for every cynic that's out there running around saying it can't be done, there are a whole bunch of folks that are saying, "Yes we can."

Yeah, times are tough. Times are tough, and they've been tougher in Detroit than just about anyplace else. But we've made it through tough times before. We do not quit. We've rolled up our sleeves. We remembered our history. And we said to ourselves there's nothing that we cannot do when we're willing to do it together. You are all a testimony to the American spirit. These cars are a testimony to the American spirit. And if we can take that same spirit and apply it across the board to all the challenges we face, there is nothing that we cannot do.

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:10 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Kim Sung-hwan of South Korea. President Lee spoke in Korean, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

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