

Remarks on the Nomination of White House Chief of Staff Jacob J. "Jack" Lew to Be Secretary of the Treasury

January 10, 2013

Good afternoon, everybody. Please have a seat.

A little more than 4 years ago, I stood with Mr. Tim Geithner and announced him as my first nominee to my Cabinet. We were barely 2 months into the financial crisis. The stock market had cratered. The housing market had cratered as well. Bank after bank was on the verge of collapse. And worst of all, more than 800,000 Americans would lose their jobs in just that month. And the bottom was not yet in sight.

So I couldn't blame Tim when he tried to tell me he wasn't the right guy for the job. [*Laughter*] But I knew that Tim's extensive experience with economic policy made him eminently qualified, and I also knew that he could hit the ground running. As Chairman of the New York Federal Reserve, he had just spent several sleepless and chaotic weeks immersed in the complexities of the crisis and had been working closely with his Republican predecessor at Treasury to save the financial system.

Then, with the wreckage of our economy still smoldering and unstable, I asked Tim to help put it back together. And thanks in large part to his steady hand, our economy has been growing again for the past 3 years, our businesses have created nearly 6 million new jobs. The money that we spent to save the financial system has largely been paid back. We've put in place rules to prevent that kind of financial meltdown from ever happening again. An auto industry was saved. We made sure taxpayers are not on the hook if the biggest firms fail again. We've taken steps to help "underwater" homeowners come up for air and open new markets to sell American goods overseas. And we've begun to reduce our deficit through a balanced mix of spending cuts and reforms to a Tax Code that, at the time that we both came in, was too skewed in favor of the wealthy at the expense of middle class Americans. So when the history books are written, Tim Geithner is going to go down as one of our finest Secretaries of the Treasury—[*applause*]—don't embarrass him. [*Laughter*]

On a personal note, Tim has been a wonderful friend and a dependable adviser throughout these last 4 years. There's an unofficial saying over at Treasury: "No peacocks, no jerks, no whiners." That would be a good saying for all of Washington: "No peacocks, no jerks, no whiners." [*Laughter*] Few embody that ideal better than Tim Geithner. That's why, when Tim was thinking about leaving a couple of years ago, I had to personally get on my knees with Carole to help convince him to stay on a little bit longer. [*Laughter*] And I could not be more grateful to Carole and the entire Geithner family for allowing him to make the sacrifices that so many of our Cabinet members ask of their families in serving the country.

The fact is, while a lot of work remains, especially to rebuild a strong middle class and offer working folks new pathways to rise into the middle class, our economy is better positioned for tomorrow than most of those other countries hit by the financial crisis. The tough decisions Tim made and carried out deserve a lot of credit for that. So I understand that Tim is ready for a break. Obviously, we're sad to see him go. But I cannot think of a better person to continue Tim's work at Treasury than Jack Lew.

Now, this is bittersweet not only because Tim is leaving, but also because Jack has been my Chief of Staff for the last year. He was my Budget Director before that. I trust his judgment; I value his friendship. I know very few people with greater integrity than the man to my left. And so I don't want to see him go because it's working out really well for me to have him here in the White House. But my loss will be the Nation's gain.

Jack has the distinction of having worked and succeeded in some of the toughest jobs in Washington and the private sector. As a congressional staffer in the 1980s, he helped negotiate the deal between President Reagan and Tip O'Neill to save Social Security. Under President Clinton, he presided over three budget surpluses in a row. So for all the talk out there about deficit reduction, making sure our books are balanced, this is the guy who did it—three times. He helped oversee one of our Nation's finest universities and one of our largest investment banks. In my administration, he has managed operations for the State Department and the budget for the entire executive branch. And over the past year, I've sought Jack's advice on virtually every decision that I've made, from economic policy to foreign policy.

Now, one reason Jack has been so effective in this town is because he is a low-key guy who prefers to surround himself with policy experts rather than television cameras. And over the years, he's built a reputation as a master of policy who can work with members of both parties and forge principled compromises. And maybe most importantly, as the son of a Polish immigrant, a man of deep and devout faith, Jack knows that every number on a page, every dollar we budget, every decision we make, has to be an expression of who we wish to be as a nation—our values, the values that say everybody gets a fair shot at opportunity—and says that we expect all of us to fulfill our individual obligations as citizens in return.

So Jack has my complete trust. I know I'm not alone in that. In the words of one former Senator, "Having Lew on your team is the equivalent, as a coach, of having the luxury of putting somebody at almost any position and knowing he will do well." And I could not agree more. So I hope, the Senate will confirm him as quickly as possible.

I want to personally thank both of these men and their families, especially Carole and Ruth, for their extraordinary service to our country. And with that, I'd like to invite them to say a few words, starting with Tim.

[At this point, Secretary of the Treasury Timothy F. Geithner and Secretary-designate Lew made brief remarks. The President continued his remarks as follows.]

Well, these are two outstanding public servants. I think the only point that I want to make—leave you with is the fact that I had never noticed Jack's signature, and when this was highlighted yesterday in the press, I considered rescinding—*[laughter]*—my offer to appoint him. Jack assures me that he is going to work to make at least one letter legible in order not to debase our currency—*[laughter]*—should he be confirmed as Secretary of the Treasury.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:40 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former Secretary of the Treasury Henry M. Paulson, Jr.; Carole Sonnenfeld Geithner, wife of Secretary Geithner; former Sen. Thomas A. Daschle; and Ruth Schwartz Lew, wife of Secretary-designate Lew. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Secretary Geithner and Secretary-designate Lew.

Categories: Appointments and Nominations : Treasury Secretary, nomination, remarks.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Clinton, William J.; Daschle, Thomas A.; Geithner, Carole Sonnenfeld; Geithner, Timothy F.; Lew, Jacob J. "Jack"; Lew, Ruth Schwartz; Paulson, Henry M., Jr.

Subjects: Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Budget, Federal : Government programs, spending reductions; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Strengthening efforts; Commerce, international : U.S. exports :: Expansion; Congress : Bipartisanship; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Financial regulations, strengthening efforts; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Housing : Mortgage refinancing programs; Taxation : Tax Code, reform; Treasury, Department of the : Secretary; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Chief of Staff.

DCPD Number: DCPD201300009.