

Remarks at Argonne National Laboratory in Lemont, Illinois
March 15, 2013

Hello, everybody! Hello, Illinois! Hello! It is good to be home!

Well, let me begin by thanking Ann for the great introduction, the great work she's doing, the leadership she's showing with her team on so many different, amazing technological breakthroughs. I want to thank Dr. Isaacs and Dr. Crabtree for giving me a great tour of your facilities.

It's not every day that I get to walk into a thermal test chamber. [*Laughter*] I told my girls that I was going to go into a thermal test chamber and they were pretty excited. I told them I'd come out looking like the Hulk. [*Laughter*] They didn't believe that. But——

I want to thank my friend and your friend—a truly great U.S. Senator, Senator Dick Durbin—huge supporter of Argonne. An outstanding Member of Congress who actually could explain some of the stuff that's going on here, Bill Foster is here. Congressman Bobby Rush, a big supporter of Argonne, glad he's here. We've got a number of State and local officials with us, including your mayor, Brian Reaves.

And I could not come to Argonne without bringing my own Nobel Prize–winning scientist, someone who has served our country so well over the past 4 years, our Energy Secretary, Dr. Steven Chu.

Now, I'm here today to talk about what should be our top priority as a nation, and that's reigniting the true engine of America's economic growth: a rising, thriving middle class and an economy built on innovation. In my State of the Union Address, I said our most important task was to drive that economic growth, and I meant it. And every day, we should be asking ourselves three questions: How do we make America a magnet for good jobs? How do we equip our people with the skills and training to do those jobs? And how do we make sure that hard work leads to a decent living?

Oh, those of you who have chairs—I wasn't sure everybody had chairs there. [*Laughter*] Please feel free to sit down, I'm sorry. Everybody was standing, and I thought Argonne—one of the effects of the sequester, you had to—[*laughter*]—get rid of chairs. That's good. I'm glad we've got some chairs.

So I chose Argonne National Lab because right now few areas hold more promise for creating good jobs and growing our economy than how we use American energy.

After years of talking about it, we're finally poised to take control of our energy future. We produce more oil than we have in 15 years. We import less oil than we have in 20 years. We've doubled the amount of renewable energy that we generate from sources like wind and solar, with 10,000—tens of thousands of good jobs to show for it. We're producing more natural gas than we ever have before, with hundreds of thousands of good jobs to show for it. We supported the first new nuclear power plant in America since the 1970s. And we're sending less carbon pollution into the environment than we have in nearly 20 years.

So we're making real progress across the board. And it's possible, in part, because of labs like this and outstanding scientists like so many of you, entrepreneurs, innovators—all of you who are working together to take your discoveries and turn them into a business.

So think about this: Just a few years ago, the American auto industry was flatlining. Today, thanks in part to discoveries made right here at Argonne, some of the most high-tech, fuel-efficient, pretty spiffy cars in the world are once again designed, engineered, and built here in the United States.

And that's why we have to keep investing in scientific research. It's why we have to maintain our edge, because the work you're doing today will end up in the products that we make and sell tomorrow. You're helping to secure our energy future. And if we do it well, then that's going to help us avoid some of the perils of climate change and leave a healthier planet for our kids. But to do it, we've got to make sure that we're making the right choices in Washington.

Just the other day, Dr. Isaacs and directors of two of our other national laboratories wrote about the effects of the so-called sequester—these across-the-board budget cuts put in place 2 weeks ago—and specifically, the effects it will have on America's scientific research. And one of the reasons I was opposed to these cuts is because they don't distinguish between wasteful programs and vital investments. They don't trim the fat; they cut into muscle and into bone, like research and development being done right here that not only gives a great place for young researchers to come and ply their trade, but also ends up creating all kinds of spinoffs that create good jobs and good wages.

So Dr. Isaacs said these cuts will force him to stop any new project that's coming down the line. And I'm quoting him now, he says, "This sudden halt on new starts will freeze American science in place while the rest of the world races forward, and it will knock a generation of young scientists off their stride, ultimately costing billions of dollars in missed future opportunities." I mean, essentially because of this sequester, we're looking at 2 years where we don't start new research. And at a time when every month you've got to replace your smartphone because something new has come up, imagine what that means when China and Germany and Japan are all continuing to plump up their basic research and we're just sitting there doing nothing.

We can't afford to miss these opportunities while the rest of the world races forward. We have to seize these opportunities. I want the next great job-creating breakthroughs—whether it's in energy or nanotechnology or bioengineering—I want those breakthroughs to be right here in the United States of America, creating American jobs and maintaining our technological lead.

So I just want to be clear: These cuts will harm, not help, our economy. They aren't the smart way to cut our deficits. And that's why I'm reaching out to Republicans and Democrats to come together around a balanced approach, a smart, phased-in approach to deficit reduction that includes smart spending cuts and entitlement reforms and new revenue, and that won't hurt our middle class or slow economic growth. And if we do that, then we can move beyond governing from crisis to crisis to crisis, and we keep our focus on policies that actually create jobs and grow our economy and move forward to face all of the other challenges we face, from fixing our broken immigration system to educating our kids to keeping them safe from gun violence.

And few pieces of business are more important for us than getting our energy future right. So here at Argonne and other labs around the country, scientists are working on getting us where we need to get 10 years from now, 20 years from now. Today, what most Americans feel first when it comes to energy prices—or energy issues are prices that they pay at the pump. And over the past few weeks, we saw—we went through another spike in gas prices. And

people are nodding here. They weren't happy about it. The problem is, this happens every year. It happened last year, the year before that. And it's a serious blow to family budgets. It feels like you're getting hit with a new tax coming right out of your pocket. And every time it happens, politicians, they dust off their three-point plans for \$2 gas, but nothing happens, and then we go through the same cycle again.

But here's the thing: Over the past 4 years, we haven't just talked about it, we've actually started doing something about it. We've worked with the auto companies to put in place the toughest fuel economy standards in our history. What that means is, by the middle of the next decade, our cars will go twice as far on a gallon of gas. And the standards that we set are part of what's driving some of the amazing scientists and engineers who are working here at Argonne Labs. We've set some achievable, but ambitious goals. So in the middle of the next decade, we expect that you'll fill up half as often, which means you spend half as much. And over the life of a new car, the average family will save more than \$8,000 at the pump. That's worth applauding. That's big news.

In fact, a new report issued today shows that America is becoming a global leader in advanced vehicles. You walk into any dealership today, and you'll see twice as many hybrids to choose from as there were 5 years ago. You'll see seven times as many cars that can go 40 miles a gallon or more. And as costs go down, sales are going up.

Last year, General Motors sold more hybrid vehicles than ever before. Ford is selling some of the most fuel-efficient cars so quickly that dealers are having a tough time keeping up with the demand. So by investing in our energy security, we're helping our businesses succeed and we're creating good middle class jobs right here in America.

So we're making progress, but the only way to really break this cycle of spiking gas prices, the only way to break that cycle for good is to shift our cars entirely—our cars and trucks—off oil. That's why, in my State of the Union Address, I called on Congress to set up an energy security trust to fund research into new technologies that will help us reach that goal.

Now, I'd like to take credit for this idea, because it's a good idea, but I can't. Basically, my proposal builds off a proposal that was put forward by a nonpartisan coalition that includes retired generals and admirals and leading CEOs. And these leaders came together around a simple idea: Much of our energy is drawn from lands and waters that we, the public, own together. So what they've proposed is let's take some of our oil and gas revenues from public lands and put it towards research that will benefit the public so we can support American ingenuity without adding a dime to our deficit.

We can support scientists who are designing new engines that are more energy efficient; support scientists that are developing cheaper batteries that can go farther on a single charge; support scientists and engineers that are devising new ways to fuel our cars and trucks with new sources of clean energy—like advanced biofuels and natural gas—so drivers can one day go coast to coast without using a drop of oil.

And the reason so many different people from the private sector, the public sector, our military support this idea is because it's not just about saving money, it's also about saving the environment, but it's also about our national security. For military officials—like General Paul Kelley, a former Commandant of the Marine Corps—this is about national security. Our reliance on oil makes us way too dependent on other parts of the world, many of which are very volatile. For business leaders—like Fred Smith, the CEO of FedEx—this is about economic

security, because when fuel prices shoot up, it's harder to plan investments, expand operations, create new jobs.

So these leaders all say we need to fix this. This is not a Democratic idea or a Republican idea, this is just a smart idea. And we should be taking their advice. Let's set up an energy security trust that helps us free our families and our businesses from painful spikes in gas once and for all. Let's do that. We can do it. We've done it before; we innovated here at Argonne.

And in the meantime, we'll keep moving on the all-of-the-above energy strategy that we've been working on for the last couple years, where we're producing more oil and gas here at home, but we're also producing more biofuels, we're also producing more fuel-efficient vehicles, more solar power, more wind power. We're working to make sure that here in America, we're building cars and homes and businesses that waste less energy.

We can do this. The nature of America's miraculous rise has been our drive, our restless spirit, our willingness to reach out to new horizons, our willingness to take risks, our willingness to innovate. We are not satisfied just because things—this is how things have been. We're going to try something that maybe we just imagine now, but if we work at it, we'll achieve it. That's the nature of America. That's what Argonne National Lab is about. That's what this facility is about.

Two decades ago, scientists at Argonne, led by Mike Thackeray, who's here today. Where is Mike? There he is right here. Mike started work on a rechargeable lithium battery for cars. And some folks at the time said the idea wasn't worth the effort. They said that even if you had the technology, the car would cost too much, it wouldn't go far enough.

But Mike and his team knew better. They knew you could do better. And America, our Government, our Federal Government made it a priority, and we funded those efforts. And Mike went to work. And when others gave up, the team kept on at it. And when development hit a snag, the team found solutions. And a few years ago, all of this hard work paid off, and scientists here at Argonne helped create a lithium ion battery that costs less, lasts longer than any that had come before.

So what was just an idea two decades ago is now rolling off assembly lines in cutting-edge, fuel-efficient cars that you can plug in at night. Well, imagine all the ideas right now with all of these young scientists and engineers that 20 years ago—or 20 years from now will be offering solutions to our problems that we can't even comprehend, as long as we're still funding these young scientists and engineers; as long as the pipeline for research is maintained; as long as we recognize, there are some things we do together as a country, because individually we can't do it. And by the way, the private sector on its own will not invest in this research because it's too expensive. It's too risky. They can't afford it in terms of their bottom lines.

So we've got to support it. And we'll all benefit from it, and our kids will benefit from it, and our grandkids will benefit from it. That's who we are. That's been the American story.

We don't stand still, we look forward. We invent. We build. We turn new ideas into new industries. We change the way we can live our lives here at home and around the world. That's how we sent a man to the Moon. That's how we invented the Internet.

When somebody tells us we can't, we say, yes we can. And I'm telling all of you, I am absolutely confident that America is poised to succeed in the same way, as long as we don't lose that spirit of innovation and recognize that we can only do it together. And I'm going to work as hard as I can every single day to make sure that we do. All right?

So congratulations, Argonne. Let's keep it up. Thank you. God bless you. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:31 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Ann M. Schlenker, director of the Center for Transportation Research, Eric D. Isaacs, director, George Crabtree, director of the Joint Center for Energy Storage Research, and Michael Thackeray, distinguished fellow and materials scientist, Argonne National Laboratory; Thom Mason, laboratory director, Oak Ridge National Laboratory; and A. Paul Alivisatos, director, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

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Locations: Lemont, IL.

Names: Alivisatos, A. Paul; Chu, Steven; Crabtree, George; Durbin, Richard J.; Foster, G. William, III; Isaacs, Eric D.; Kelley, Paul X.; Mason, Thom; Obama, Malia; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Reaves, Brian K.; Rush, Bobby L.; Schlenker, Ann M.; Smith, Frederick W.; Thackeray, Michael.

Subjects: Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Budget, Federal : Entitlement spending, reform; Budget, Federal : Government programs, spending reductions; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Improvement; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Postsecondary education :: Career training and continuing education; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: U.S. production; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: Promotion efforts; Energy : Carbon dioxide emissions, reduction; Energy : Domestic sources; Energy : Energy efficiency and weatherization :: Homes and buildings; Energy : Fuel efficiency standards, strengthening efforts; Energy : Gasoline, oil, and natural gas costs; Energy : Hybrid and alternative fuel automobiles :: Battery technology, U.S. production; Energy : Hybrid and alternative fuel vehicles :: Promotion efforts; Energy : National energy policy; Energy : Nuclear energy :: Promotion and expansion efforts; Energy, Department of : Secretary; Environment : Climate change ; Illinois : Argonne National Laboratory in Lemont; Illinois : President's visit; Science and technology : Research and development; Taxation : Tax Code, reform.

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