

Remarks to the National Governors Association

February 23, 2015

Thank you, everybody. Thank you. Thank you so much. Everybody, have a seat. Welcome to the White House once again. The only thing more glamorous than a black-tie dinner with Hall and Oates is a Q&A with Obama and Biden. [*Laughter*] So we save the best for last. I know you guys are excited.

I want to thank everybody for being here. I'm going to be very brief. As Joe said, last year was a breakthrough year for the United States. Last year, the economy created more than 3 million new jobs, and that's the best job growth in any single year since the 1990s. The same was true for manufacturing growth. In fact, manufacturing jobs grew even faster than the overall economy. Deficit cut by two-thirds. Energy production at an alltime high. All told, businesses have now created over 12 million jobs over the last 5 years. And the best news of all: Wages have started to go up.

So America is as well positioned as we've been in a very long time. And the question is, what kind of choices do we now make together to make sure that that momentum is sustained? I have talked about before, and I want to emphasize again during our conversations, the belief that middle class economics is what works: the idea that not only do we want the country as a whole to prosper, but we want to make sure that every single person in this country has opportunity; that if they work hard, they can get ahead; that prosperity is broadly shared; and not only is everybody sharing in that prosperity, but everybody is contributing to that prosperity. And in order to do that, we got to make sure that everybody has got a fair shot, that everybody does their fair share, and everybody is playing by the same set of rules. We've got to make sure that anybody out there who is scrimping and saving and trying to figure out how to send their kids to college and worrying about retirement, that they've got some sense of security and some sense that they can make it.

As Joe indicated, I think every one of the Governors here in every one the States of this great Union of ours cares about these same things and is doing a lot of creative work to enhance the opportunities for advancement for their citizens. You've got States like Oklahoma that are leading the way in making sure that we're educating our children at the earliest age with high-quality early childhood and pre-K education.

Since nine—2013, 17 States have joined companies like the Gap and now Walmart to raise their minimum wage, make sure that some of the hardest working people in America are able to support their families if they're working full time. States are leading the way in removing unnecessary licensing requirements so workers can start filling up some of the jobs that they already have the skills for. You've got States like California that are leading the way in providing paid leave so that mom or dad can take a day off to care for a sick child or an aging parent without having to give up a paycheck.

And States are leading the way in making sure more people have the security of health insurance. And today, thanks to the Affordable Care Act, more than 10 million Americans now have the peace of mind that comes with being covered. I want to thank all the Governors, Democrats and Republicans, supporters and some opponents of the ACA, who have expanded Medicaid to millions of people over the past 2 years. I think there's a recognition that it makes sense and it's bigger than politics. As Governor Kasich said for Ohio: "It saves lives. No

question about it." And if your State isn't one of the 28 that has already expanded Medicaid, I'd urge you to consider it, because our team is prepared to work with you to make it happen.

Because some of you may not always agree with my approach or policies, I think that we can all agree that it's a good thing when a family doesn't lose a home just because a member of that family gets sick. And surely, we can agree that it's a good thing when businesses have roads and bridges and ports and the kind of Internet connections that allow all of us to thrive.

Surely, we can all agree that when workers and management come together around helping families getting ahead, that's a good thing and that it's a good thing when workers and businesses can compete on a level playing field, with new agreements for fair and free trade in some of the world's fastest growing markets.

So that's going to be my agenda for the next 2 years. Congress may pass parts of that agenda, not others, but I'm going to keep on pushing for these ideas because I believe it's the right thing to do. I think it's right for America.

And I will keep urging Congress to move past some of the habits of manufactured crises and self-inflicted wounds that have so often bogged us down over the last 5 years. We've got one example of that right now. Unless Congress acts, one week from now, more than a hundred thousand DHS employees, Border Patrol, port inspectors, TSA agents, will show up to work without getting paid. Now, they all work in your States. These are folks who, if they don't have a paycheck, are not going to be able to spend that money in your States. It will have a direct impact on your economy, and it will have a direct impact on America's national security, because their hard work helps to keep us safe. And as Governors, you know that we can't afford to play politics with our national security.

So instead, let's try to focus on some of the things that we have in common and deliver real results. I want to thank Governor Inslee and his fellow West Coast Governors who have helped workers and management reach an agreement that reopened 29 ports and kept business flowing. I got to add a plug for Tom Perez, who went out there and, I think, really made an extraordinary contribution to that effort. That's going to make a big difference for the country's economy as a whole. That's the kind of thing that we can accomplish when we put aside divisions and focus on some commonsense steps to improve the economy for everybody. And it's an example that I hope Congress follows in the months ahead.

Keep in mind, though, even when Congress does not act or does not act fast enough, I think we can still work together to make a difference. And whether you're a Democrat or a Republican, what I've found is that the more specific we are on focusing on problems, less concerned we are about politics, the more we get accomplished.

Now, I'll give you one specific example, and that's in the criminal justice area. Last year was the first time in 40 years that the Federal incarceration rate and the crime rate went down at the same time. First time in 40 years. Let's keep that progress going and reform our criminal justice system in ways that protect our citizens and serves us all. In Georgia, Governor Deal has given judges new alternatives to harsh mandatory minimum sentencing. In Connecticut, Governor O'Malley [Malloy]^{*} announced his "Second Chance Society" plan to help former prisoners rejoin their communities. We want to be a partner in those efforts.

And that's what the American people expect. One of the great privileges of being President is, you get to travel everywhere and you get to meet people from just about every

^{*} White House correction.

walk of life. And what I have found is the assumption that I made, that I think Joe made when we first ran for office, still holds true: The American people are good and decent, and they have a lot more in common than our politics would indicate. And if we can just focus on that, there's a lot of good stuff that we can get done.

So I'm in the fourth quarter of my Presidency, or as some of you might call it, the kickoff for your campaign season. *[Laughter]* But I think there's still a lot that we can get done together. I think we can build an America that is creating more opportunities for hard-working folks. I think we can make sure that the future for the next generation is even brighter than the one that we enjoyed. And I look forward to making progress together at the Federal and State levels. Okay?

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:27 a.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to musicians Daryl Hall and John Oates; Gov. Jay R. Inslee of Washington; and Gov. Dannel P. Malloy of Connecticut.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : National Governors Association :: Meeting.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Deal, J. Nathan ; Hall, Daryl; Inslee, Jay R.; Kasich, John R.; Malloy, Dannel P.; Oates, John; Perez, Thomas E.

Subjects: Commerce, international : Free and fair trade; Communications : Broadband and wireless technologies; Congress : Bipartisanship; Connecticut : Governor; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Early childhood education programs; Georgia : Governor; Governors Association, National; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Homeland Security, Department of : Funding; Labor issues : Minimum wage; Labor issues : Paid family and sick leave; Labor issues : Western ports, labor dispute; Labor, Department of : Secretary; Law enforcement and crime : Criminal justice system, reform efforts; Law enforcement and crime : Sentencing requirements, reform; Ohio : Governor; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts; Washington : Governor; White House Office : Vice President.

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