

Remarks at the Caterpillar Plant in East Peoria, Illinois
February 12, 2009

Thank you, everybody. It's good to be back home. Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you. Please, everybody have a seat. Have a seat.

Well, first of all, let me thank Dan Armstrong for his wonderful introduction and participation in this event. And we are going to be thinking about you and your family each and every day in the coming months. I want to thank Peoria's own Ray LaHood, who is doing outstanding work as my Transportation Secretary. Ray comes from a long line of Republicans I love, starting with Bob Michel and—you know, they're just—I think there's a common-sense, Midwestern, can-do, bipartisan attitude that Ray represents, and I am so pleased that he's in my Cabinet.

Now, his successor, Congressman Schock, where is he? He's back here; he's right here—stand up, Aaron. This is a—Aaron's still trying to make up his mind about our recovery package, so he has the chance to be in the mold of Bob Michel and Ray LaHood. And so we know that all of you are going to talk to him after our event, because he's a very talented young man. I've got great confidence in him to do the right thing for the people of Peoria.

I also want to thank Jim Owens, who I've gotten to know and is one of the top CEOs that we have in the country and he—[*applause*]. You know, Jim is obviously confronted with some tough choices, like every CEO is right now, but what I'm absolutely confident in is he's thinking about the company's long-term growth, and he cares about his workers. He cares about the long term and not just the short term, and I appreciate him agreeing to serve as one of our economic advisers during this process. And I think this company is going to be in good hands with him at the helm. So thank you very much, Jim, for being a part of this event today.

Well, you notice I've been traveling a little bit. I had to come to Peoria. You have to see how things are playing in Peoria. We come together today, as Jim said, at a difficult moment for our country.

You know what, I know I'm already in my speech, but there's one other thing I forgot to do. There's a guy here who I served with in the State Senate. He's just a good buddy of mine; I love him to death. Give George Shadid a big round of applause. I just spotted him. [*Applause*] Stand up, George. I like his wife more, but George is okay. [*Laughter*]

We come together today at a difficult moment for our country and for this great American company. In recent weeks, there's been a lot of talk in Washington about how to address our economic crisis, with a lot of back and forth about dollars and numbers. But here's the thing: When we say we've lost 3.6 million jobs since this recession began—nearly 600,000 last month alone—when we talk about the 22,000 layoffs announced here at Caterpillar, a company that has sustained this community for more than 80 years and that had one of its banner years just last year, then you know this isn't about figures on a balance sheet; it's about families that many of you probably know. It's about folks like Dan all across this State and all across this country, folks who are losing their jobs and their health care and their homes that were their foothold on the American Dream.

And it's about the ripple effects across this community, from restaurants with fewer customers because folks can't afford to eat out anymore, to shops that can't sell their goods

because people can't afford to buy them, to the companies that do business with Caterpillar but now find themselves cutting back because Caterpillar is cutting back.

So what's happening at this company tells us a larger story about what's happening with our Nation's economy, because, in many ways, you can measure America's bottom line by looking at Caterpillar's bottom line.

Caterpillar builds the equipment that moves the earth. Your machines plow the farms that feed our families, build the towers that shape our skylines, lay the roads that connect our communities, power the trucks that deliver our goods, and more.

So those 22,000 layoffs aren't just a crisis for those families or for the communities like Peoria and Decatur and Aurora, they are an urgent warning sign for America, because when a company as good and successful and efficient and lean and mean as Caterpillar is cutting back production and shedding jobs, that means we're not building up this country. It means we're not building new homes and offices or rebuilding crumbling schools and failing infrastructure.

In short, it means we're standing still. And in this new global economy, standing still is the surest way to end up falling behind. Standing still is not an option. It's not who we are; it's not who we have to be. Right now, we have a once-in-a-generation chance to act boldly, to turn adversity into opportunity and use this crisis as a chance to transform our economy for the 21st century.

That is the driving purpose of the recovery and reinvestment plan that I've put before Congress. It's a plan that will save or create more than 3.5 million jobs over the next 2 years, that will ignite spending by businesses and consumers and make the investments necessary for lasting economic growth and prosperity.

Now, these past few weeks, we've had a spirited debate in Washington about this plan. And not everybody shares the same view about how we should move forward. At times, our discussions have been contentious. But that's a good thing. Diverse viewpoints are the lifeblood of our democracy; debating them is how we learn from each other's perspective, we temper each other's excesses, we make better decisions.

But the debate is now coming to an end. The bill has passed the House, and it's passed the Senate. It's been reconciled, and now it's going back to those two chambers so it can get on my desk. It is time for Congress to act, and I hope they act in a bipartisan fashion. But no matter how they act, when they do, when they finally pass our plan, I believe it will be a major step forward on our path to economic recovery.

And I'm not the only one who thinks so. Yesterday, Jim, the head of Caterpillar, said that if Congress passes our plan, this company will be able to rehire some of the folks who were just laid off. And that's a story I'm confident will be repeated at companies across the country, companies that are currently struggling to borrow money selling their products, struggling to make payroll, but could find themselves in a different position when we start implementing the plan. Rather than downsizing, they may be able to start growing again. Rather than cutting jobs, they may be able to create them again.

That's the goal at the heart of this plan: to create jobs. And not just any jobs, not just make-work jobs, but putting people to work doing the work that America needs done: repairing our infrastructure, modernizing our schools and our hospitals, promoting the clean alternative energy sources that will finally help us declare independence from foreign oil.

So once Congress passes this plan, and I sign it into law, a new wave of innovation, activity, and construction will be unleashed all across America. We'll put people to work building wind turbines and solar panels and fuel-efficient cars. We'll upgrade our schools, creating 21st century classrooms and libraries and labs for millions of children across America. We'll computerize our health care system to save billions of dollars and countless lives; lay down broadband Internet lines to connect rural schools and small businesses so they can compete with their counterparts anywhere in the world; rebuilding our crumbling roads and bridges; repairing our dangerous dams and levees so we don't face another Katrina.

Think about all the work out there to be done, and Caterpillar will be selling the equipment that does the work. And in addition to saving and creating jobs, we'll also ensure that folks in places like Peoria who've lost their jobs through no fault of their own can receive greater unemployment benefits and continue their health care coverage.

Here in Illinois, that will mean an additional \$100 per month to more than 820,000 workers who've lost their jobs. It means extended unemployment benefits for another 145,000 folks who've been laid off, are out there busy looking for work, but haven't found a job yet. It's not just our moral responsibility to help them, it also makes good economic sense. If you don't have money, you can't spend it. And if people aren't spending, our economy will continue to decline.

And for that same reason, the plan will provide badly needed middle-class tax relief, putting money back into the pockets of just about everybody here, nearly 4.9 million workers and their families here in Illinois, so you can pay your bills and meet your families' needs during a downturn.

In the end, that's what the recovery plan is about. It's about giving people a way to make a living, support their families, and live out their dreams.

Americans aren't looking for a handout. They just want to work. They're meeting their responsibilities. You're meeting your responsibilities. But when you start seeing an economic crisis of this magnitude, everybody's got to chip in; everybody's got to pull together. Politics has to stop, and we've got to get the job done.

Passing this plan is an important step, but it's just one step. It's only the beginning of what we're going to have to do to turn around our economy. So to truly address this crisis, we're also going to need to address the home mortgage crisis. We're going to have to get credit flowing again. We need to reform our financial markets, both to restore trust and ensure that a crisis like this can never happen again. And whether it's rebuilding our schools or reforming our health care system or investing in clean energy, much work remains to lay the foundation for long-term economic growth and fiscal responsibility.

We've got to spend some money now to pull us out of this recession. But as soon as we're out of this recession, we've got to get serious about starting to live within our means, instead of leaving debt for our children and our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren. That's not the responsible way. That's not how folks here in Peoria operate in their own lives, and they should expect the Government is equally responsible. So the road ahead is not an easy one. Some of our plans might not always work out exactly the way we'd like. Our recovery will likely be measured in terms of years and not months.

But to anyone who might feel doubtful or discouraged, I urge you to think about the history of this company. As some of you know, about 60 years ago, shortly after the end of World War II, Caterpillar decided to build its new offices somewhere other than East Peoria.

But the people of this city had other ideas. They were hard at work rebuilding and modernizing, and they were determined to make East Peoria an ideal home for companies like Caterpillar. But Caterpillar's leaders were impressed, and ultimately, they changed their minds. They decided to go ahead and build offices right here in East Peoria to be, as a former chairman of the company put it, "no less willing to get in step with the march of progress."

Throughout the 20th century, this company has helped lead that march. From working far beyond capacity during World War II—even with 6,000 workers on military leave—to surviving the recession in the 1980s and emerging stronger and more competitive, to seizing the promise of today's green economy by leading the way with clean diesel engines, Caterpillar has shaped the American landscape, shown the world what a great American company looks like.

I know the past few months have been hard for this company. But they—I also know that they've been among the worst in a generation. But here's what else I know: Here in America, even in our darkest moments, we've held fast to a vision of a better future, and we've been willing to work for it and struggle for it and sacrifice for it.

That's how it's going to be again. I have the fullest confidence that if we think boldly and we act quickly and fully devote ourselves to the work at hand, then out of this ordeal will come a better day and a brighter future for our children and our grandchildren. That's the history of this company. That's the history of this city. That's the history of this State. And that's the history that we're going to make, you and me together.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:20 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Dan Armstrong, former employee, Caterpillar, Inc.; former Rep. Robert H. Michel of Illinois; Rep. Aaron Schock of Illinois; and Illinois State Senator George P. Shadid, and his wife Lorraine.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Economy, national :: East Peoria, IL.

Locations: East Peoria, IL.

Names: Armstrong, Dan; Armstrong, Dan; LaHood, Ray; Michel, Robert H.; Owens, James W.; Owens, James W.; Schock, Aaron; Shadid, George P.; Shadid, Lorraine.

Subjects: Budget, Federal : Congressional spending restraint; Congress : Bipartisanship; Economy : Financial regulations, modernization efforts; Economy, national : Credit markets, stabilization efforts; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Financial legislation; Economy, national : Financial legislation; Economy, national : Financial legislation; Economy, national : Financial legislation; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Education : School improvement and renovation; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment insurance; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Health and medical care : Health insurance, protection of coverage; Health and medical care : Information technology; Housing : Foreclosure rates; Illinois : President's visits; Illinois :

President's visits; Science and technology : Broadband technology; Taxation : Tax relief;
Transportation : Highway system, modernization efforts; Transportation, Department of :
Secretary.

DCPD Number: DCPD200900081.