

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks at the General Electric Plant in Schenectady, New York
January 21, 2011

Hello, hello! Hello, Schenectady! It is good to be in New York. Now, let me just begin—if I'm not mistaken, Governor Cuomo, who is going to be an outstanding Governor, he tried to give me a Jets hat. *[Laughter]* I had to refuse it. I had Secret Service confiscate it. *[Laughter]* But I will say both the Jets and the Bears, I think, are slight underdogs, so we're going to be rooting for the underdogs on Sunday.

In addition to Governor Cuomo, I just want to acknowledge Lieutenant Governor Bob Duffy is here. Two great friends of mine and great champions for New York in the United States Senate, Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand are here. Members of the congressional delegation from up this way, Paul Tonko, Chris Gibson, and Richard Hanna are all here.

Attorney General Eric Schneiderman is here. The outstanding mayor of Schenectady, who flew up with me because we had an event down at the White House for mayors—and he was on Marine One and Air Force One, and he was—he looked like he was having a pretty good time—*[laughter]*—Brian Stratton is here. And from Albany, Mayor Jerry Jennings is here. Thank you.

Now, Jeff, thank you for the outstanding introduction, and thank you GE. It is great to be here. I just had a chance to see some of the high-tech steam turbines and all kinds of fancy stuff that's being made here, being manufactured here at this plant. And it is unbelievably impressive, and it's part of a proud tradition, because GE has been producing turbines and generators here in Schenectady for more than a century.

Now, a lot has changed since those early days. We've seen technologies transform the ways we work and the ways we communicate with one another. We've seen our economy transformed by rising competition from around the globe. And over the years, in the wake of these shifts, upstate New York and places like it have seen more than their fair share of hard times.

But what has never changed—we see it right here at this plant, we see it right here at GE—is that America is still home to the most creative and most innovative businesses in the world. We've got the most productive workers in the world. America is home to inventors and dreamers and builders and creators. All of you represent people who each and every day are pioneering the technologies and discoveries that not only improve our lives, but they drive our economy.

Across the country, there are entrepreneurs opening businesses. There are researchers testing new medical treatments. There are engineers pushing the limits of design and the programmers poring over lines of code. And there are workers like you on assembly lines all across the country, eager to create some of the best products the world has ever seen. There are students training to take new jobs by their side.

In this community, GE is building one of the world's most sophisticated manufacturing facilities to produce state-of-the-art batteries. Last year, you opened the headquarters of your renewable energy operations, and you created 650 jobs on this campus.

So our challenge, especially as we continue to fight our way back from the worst recession in our lifetimes, is to harness this spirit, to harness this potential, the potential that all of you represent.

Our challenge is to do everything we can to make it easier for folks to bring products to market and to start and expand new businesses and to grow and hire new workers. I want plants like this all across America. You guys are a model of what's possible.

And that's why, as part of the tax cut compromise that I signed at the end of the year, we provided incentives for businesses to make new capital investments. And in fact, GE is investing \$13 million in advanced manufacturing at this plant, taking advantage of some of these tax breaks.

We also extended a program that GE says its customers have used to invest \$6 billion in clean energy production across this country, driving demand for the company's wind turbines. And I saw one of those big turbines on the way in. So we know we can compete not just in the industries of the past, but also in the industries of the future.

But in an ever-shrinking world, our success in these efforts will be determined not only by what we build in Schenectady, but also what we can sell in Shanghai. For America to compete around the world, we need to export more goods around the world. That's where the customers are. It's that simple.

And as I was walking through the plant, you guys had put up some handy signs so I knew what I was looking at. *[Laughter]* And I noticed on all of them they said, this is going to Kuwait, this is going to India, this is going to Saudi Arabia. That's where the customers are, and we want to sell them products made here in America. That's why I met with Chinese leaders this week, and Jeff joined me at the state dinner.

During those meetings, we struck a deal to open Chinese markets to our products. They're selling here, and that's fine. But we want to sell there. We want to open up their markets so that we got two-way trade, not just one-way trade.

So the deals we struck are going to mean more than \$45 billion in new business for American companies—\$45 billion—that translates into 235,000 new jobs for American workers.

And that's also why I fought hard to negotiate a new trade deal with South Korea that will support more than 70,000 American jobs. That's why I traveled to India a few months ago—and Jeff was there with us—where our businesses were able to reach agreement to export \$10 billion in goods and services to India. And that's going to lead to another 50,000 jobs here in the United States.

Part of the reason I wanted to come to this plant is because this plant is what that trip was all about. As part of the deal we struck in India, GE is going to sell advanced turbines—the ones you guys make—to generate power at a plant in Samalkot, India—Samalkot, India. Most of you hadn't heard of Samalkot—*[laughter]*—but now you need to know about it, because you're going to be selling to Samalkot, India. And that new business halfway around the world is going to help support more than 1,200 manufacturing jobs and more than 400 engineering jobs right here in this community, because of that sale.

So it's a perfect example of why promoting exports is so important. That's why I've set a goal of doubling American exports within 5 years. And we're on track to do it. We're already up

18 percent, and we're just going to keep on going, because we're going to sell more and more stuff all around the world.

When a company sells products overseas, it leads to hiring on our shores. The deal in Samalkot means jobs in Schenectady. That's how we accelerate growth. That's how we create opportunities for our people. This is how we go from an economy that was powered by what we borrow and what we consume; that's what happened over the last 10 years. What was driving our economy was we were spending a lot on credit cards. Everybody was borrowing a lot. The Chinese were selling a lot to us. Folks were selling a lot to us from all over the world. We've got to reverse that. We want an economy that's fueled by what we invent and what we build. We're going back to Thomas Edison's principles. We're going to build stuff and invent stuff.

Now, nobody understands this better than Jeff Immelt. He understands what it takes for America to compete in the global economy. As he mentioned, I've appreciated his wisdom during these past 2 years. We had a difficult, difficult crisis on our hands. It was a few days after I took office that I assembled a group of business leaders, including Jeff, to form a new advisory board, because at that time the economy was in a freefall, and we were facing the prospects of another great depression, with ripple effects all around the world. It wasn't just the United States. The entire world economy was contracting. And such—at such a dangerous moment, it was essential that we heard voices and ideas from business leaders and from experts who weren't part of the usual Washington crowd.

And I tasked Jeff and the other advisers with one mission: help to steer our Nation from deep recession into recovery, help take the economy from one that's shrinking to one that's growing. And over the past 2 years, I've been very grateful for their advice.

And I especially want to commend the man who chaired the panel, one of the Nation's preeminent economists, the former head of the Federal Reserve, Paul Volcker, because he offered unvarnished advice, and he wasn't afraid to counter the conventional wisdom. He did a great service to this country.

In fact, it was 6 months ago today that I signed into law a set of financial reforms to protect consumers and prevent future financial crises and put an end to taxpayer-funded bailouts, and that's an achievement in which Paul Volcker was instrumental. So we're very proud of him for that work.

Now, 2 years later, though, we're in a different place. In part because of the economic plan that my recovery board helped shape, the economy is now growing again. Over the last year, businesses have added more than a million jobs. The pace of hiring and growth is picking up, and that's encouraging news. But at the same time, while businesses are adding jobs, millions of people are still out there looking for work. And even here in Schenectady, as well as GE is doing, I know everybody here knows a neighbor or friend or relative who's still out of work. So it's not—it's a great thing that the economy is growing, but it's not growing fast enough yet to make up for the damage that was done by the recession.

The past 2 years were about pulling our economy back from the brink. The next 2 years, our job now, is putting our economy into overdrive. Our job is to do everything we can to ensure that businesses can take root and folks can find good jobs and America is leading the global competition that will determine our success in the 21st century.

And so now, to help fulfill this new mission, I'm assembling a new group of business leaders and outside advisers. And I am so proud and pleased that Jeff has agreed to chair this

panel—my Council on Jobs and Competitiveness—because we think GE has something to teach businesses all across America.

Now, I hope you don't mind, I'm going to brag about your boss for a second here. Jeff is somebody who brings a wealth of experience to the table. He is one of the Nation's most respected and admired business leaders, and that's a reputation he earned over 10 years at the helm of this company. In the coming days, we'll be announcing the business leaders, the labor leaders, the economists, and others who will join with Jeff to help guide us into that overdrive mode.

I know this Council will be an important asset as we seek to do everything we can to spur hiring and ensure our Nation can compete with anybody on the planet. That means spurring innovation in growing industries like clean energy manufacturing, the kind of stuff that's being done right here at this plant, ensuring our economy isn't held back by crumbling roads and broken-down infrastructure.

It means educating and training our people. I just had a chance to meet one of the guys here at the plant who had been trained at Hudson Valley, which I had an opportunity to visit a while back. And that's an example of the kind of partnerships that we've got to duplicate all across the country.

Schenectady offers that kind of example. Hudson Valley Community College created a program so students could earn a paycheck and have their tuition covered while training for jobs at this plant. That's helping folks find good work, it's helping GE fill high-skill positions, it's making this whole region more competitive.

So ultimately, winning this global competition comes down to living up to the promise of places like this. Here in Schenectady, you're heirs to a great tradition of innovation and enterprise, the pioneering work of Edison that made the entire modern age possible: the tungsten filaments that still light our homes, the X-rays that diagnose disease, now the advanced batteries and renewable energy sources that hold so much promise for the future.

In these pioneering efforts, we see what America is all about. We see what has in our past allowed us to not only weather rough storms, but reach brighter days. And it's got to remind us that we've got those same strengths. This is America. We still have that spirit of invention and that sense of optimism, that belief that if we work hard and we give it our all, that anything is possible in this country.

The future belongs to us. And you at this plant, you are showing us the way forward. So thank you so much, everybody. God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:03 p.m.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : General Electric plant in Schenectady, NY.

Locations: Schenectady, NY.

Names: Cuomo, Andrew M.; Duffy, Robert J.; Gibson, Christopher; Gillibrand, Kirsten; Hanna, Richard; Immelt, Jeffrey R.; Jennings, Gerald D.; Schneiderman, Eric T.; Schumer, Charles E.; Stratton, Brian U.; Tonko, Paul D.; Volcker, Paul A.

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