

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks in Fletcher, North Carolina

October 17, 2011

The President. Hello, Asheville! It is good to be back in Asheville, North Carolina! I love Asheville. In fact, I think I should be on the tourism promotion bureau of Asheville. Every time I meet somebody, I say, have you guys gone down to Asheville? That's a nice place to be. So it is wonderful to be back in one of my favorite parts of the country. Our family has great memories of staying here, and it's always nice to get out of Washington—[laughter]—and breathe some of that mountain air.

I want to recognize a couple of people who are here. First of all, one of the outstanding Senators in the United States Senate, your Senator, Kay Hagan, is in the house. Kay's daughter just got married this weekend, so, congratulations to Kay's daughter. We are so thrilled by that.

And we also have your lovely and intelligent mayor of Asheville, Terry Bellamy is in the house. The last time I was here Terry said she could play basketball. And so we went out—it turned out she was a cheerleader and not a basketball player. [Laughter] But she's doing an outstanding job overall. Thank you both for coming.

Now, as you may have noticed, I came here on a plane. It's a pretty nice plane. But I'm leaving on a bus. The bus is pretty hard to miss. And over the next few days, we are going to take this bus through North Carolina and Virginia, and I'm going to get a chance to hear from folks about how they're doing, what direction they want to take the country in.

And I'll be doing a little bit of talking, but mostly I'm going to do a whole lot of listening, because there doesn't seem to be much listening going on in Washington these days. People don't seem to be paying much attention to the folks who sent them there in the first place, and that's a shame. Because once you escape the partisanship and the political point-scoring in Washington, once you start really start listening to the American people, it's pretty clear what our country and your leaders should be spending their time on.

Audience members. Jobs!

The President. We should be talking about jobs. When you hear what's going on out in the country, when you take the time to listen, you understand that a lot of folks are hurting out there. Too many people are looking for work. Too many families are looking for that sense of security that's been slipping away for the past decade now.

Here in North Carolina, you've got thousands of construction workers who lost their jobs when the housing bubble went burst. Some of those construction workers are here today. They've got experience. They've got skills. All they want is to be back on the job site doing what they do best.

And there is plenty of work to go around. In this airport, right here in Asheville, you've got a runway that needs to be widened and repaired. You've got a taxiway that's in the wrong spot, which means that planes sometimes get too close together. So we could be doing some work right here at the Asheville airport that would help boost tourism, help to boost the economy here, put people to work right now.

But it's not just here in Asheville. All across the State, you've got highways that need to be built. You've got bridges that need to be fixed. You've got schools that need to be modernized.

And that's what America used to do best. We used to build things: built the transcontinental railroad, built the Golden Gate Bridge, the Hoover Dam, the Grand Central Station. There's no reason why we should sit here and watch the best highways and the newest airports being built in China. We should be building them right here in the United States of America, right here in North Carolina.

Now, our problems were a long time in the making. We're not going to solve them overnight. But there are things we can do right now to put people back to work right now. There are things we should do right now to give the economy the jolt that it needs. So that's why I sent to Congress the "American Jobs Act."

Keep in mind, Asheville, this is the kind of bill containing the kinds of proposals that in the past have received support from Democrats and Republicans. It's completely paid for by asking our wealthiest citizens, folks making more than a million dollars a year, to pay their fair share.

Independent economists—not my economists, but independent economists—have said this jobs bill would create nearly 2 million jobs. That's not my opinion. It's not the opinion of folks who work for me. It's the opinion of people who evaluate these kinds of things for a living. It says this bill will help put people back to work and give our economy a boost right away.

But apparently none of this matters to the Republicans in the Senate, because last week they got together to block this bill. They said no to putting teachers and construction workers back on the job. They said no to rebuilding our roads and our bridges and our airports. They said no to cutting taxes for middle class families and small businesses, when all they've been doing is cutting taxes for the wealthiest Americans. They said no to helping veterans find jobs.

Essentially, they said no to you, because it turns out one poll found that 63 percent of Americans support the ideas in this jobs bill. So 63 percent of Americans support the jobs bill that I put forward; a hundred percent of Republicans in the Senate voted against it. That doesn't make any sense, does it?

Audience members. No!

The President. No, it does not.

Now, it turns out that the Republicans have a plan too. I want to be fair. They call—they put forward this plan last week. They called it the "Real American Jobs Act." The "real one," that's what they called it, just in case you were wondering. *[Laughter]* So let's take a look at what the Republican American jobs act looks like. It turns out the Republican plan boils down to a few basic ideas: they want to gut regulations, they want to let Wall Street do whatever it wants, they want to drill more, and they want to repeal health care reform. That's their jobs plan.

So let's do a little comparison here. The Republican plan says that what's been standing in the way between us and full employment are laws that keep companies from polluting as much as they want. On the other hand, our plan puts teachers, construction workers, firefighters, and police officers back on the job.

Their plan says the big problem we have is that we helped to get 30 million Americans health insurance. They figure we should throw those folks off the health insurance rolls; somehow that's going to help people find jobs. Our plan says we're better off if every small business and worker in America gets a tax cut, and that's what's in my jobs bill.

Their plan says we should go back to the good old days before the financial crisis when Wall Street was writing its own rules. They want to roll back all the reforms that we've put into place. Our plan says we need to make it easier for small businesses to grow and hire and push this economy forward.

All right, so you've gotten a sense—you got their plan, and then we got my plan. My plan says we're going to put teachers back in the classroom, construction workers back to work rebuilding America, rebuilding our schools, tax cuts for small businesses, tax cuts for hiring veterans, tax cuts if you give your worker a raise. That's my plan.

And then you got their plan, which is let's have dirtier air, dirtier water, less people with health insurance.

All right so, so far at least, I feel better about my plan. [*Laughter*] But let's admit I'm a little biased. So remember those independent economists who said our plan would create jobs, maybe as many as almost 2 million jobs, grow the economy by as much as 2 percent? So one of the same economists that took a look at our plan took a look at the Republican plan, and they said, well, this won't do much to help the economy in the short term; it could actually cost us jobs. We could actually lose jobs with their plan.

So I'll let you decide which plan is the real "American Jobs Act."

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Look, I appreciate the "4 more years," but right now I'm thinking about the next 13 months. Because, yes, we've got an election coming up, but that election is a long ways away, and a lot of folks can't wait. A lot of folks are living paycheck to paycheck. A lot of folks are living week to week. You've got kids right now who've lost their teachers because at the local level you ended up having layoffs. You've got bridges right now that are crumbling and deteriorating. So we don't have time to wait. And we've got a choice right now—right now.

Look, I want to work with Republicans on ways to create jobs right now. And where they've got a decent idea I'm happy to work with them. Just last week, we passed a bipartisan trade agreement with Korea that will allow us to sell more goods overseas and support almost 70,000 jobs here at home. Because my attitude is, if we're buying Hyundais and Kias, I want them buying some Fords and Chryslers and Chevys.

So if they're serious about creating jobs, I'm ready to go. I don't think anybody doubts that I have gone out of my way to try to find areas of cooperation with these Republicans. In fact, some of you have been mad at me for trying too hard to cooperate with them, haven't you? Some of you—I get some of your letters and your e-mails. You're all like, why are you cooperating with them all the time? Because it can't be all about politics; sometimes we've got to try to actually get something done. And so I'm eager to see them stand up with a serious approach to putting people back to work.

It's time to focus less on satisfying some wing of the party and more on commonsense ideas that we can take to put people to work right now and help the middle class and help people get into the middle class, because there are a whole bunch of folks who are hurting out there and have never gotten the opportunity.

So we're going to give Members of Congress another chance to step up to the plate and do the right thing. Kay and I, we've decided, let's go ahead and let them do the right thing one more time. We're going to give them another chance to do their jobs by looking after your jobs.

So this week, I'm asking Members of Congress to vote—what we're going to do is we're going to break up my jobs bill. Maybe they just couldn't understand the whole all at once. [Laughter] So we're going to break it up into bite-size pieces so they can take a thoughtful approach to this legislation.

So this week, I'm going to ask Members of Congress to vote on one component of the plan, which is whether we should put hundreds of thousands of teachers back in the classroom and cops back on the street and firefighters back to work. So Members of Congress will have a chance to decide: What kind of future do our kids deserve? Should we stand up for men and women who are often digging into their own pockets to buy school supplies, when we know that the education of our children is going to determine our future as a nation?

They're going to have a chance to decide: Do we want to make sure that we're looking after the men and women who protect our communities every day, our first-responders, our firefighters, our police officers? And then, after they've taken that vote, we're going to give Members of Congress a chance to vote on whether we're going to put construction workers back to work. Should they be just sitting around while roads and bridges and runways fall apart, or should we put them back to work doing the work that America needs done?

After that, we'll give them a chance to decide whether unemployed Americans should continue to struggle, or whether we should give them the experience and support they need to get back in the workforce and build a better life. And we'll ask them to take a stand on whether we should ask people like me to pay a little more so middle class families and small businesses can pay a little less and end up creating the kinds of jobs we need in this economy.

So those are the choices that Members of Congress are going to face in the coming weeks. And if they vote against these proposals again—like I said, maybe they just didn't understand the whole thing, so we're breaking it up into pieces. If they vote against taking steps that we know will put Americans back to work right now——

Audience members. Right now!

The President. ——right now——

Audience members. Right now!

The President. ——then they're not going to have to answer to me. They're going to have to answer to you. They're going to have to come down to North Carolina and tell kids why they can't have their teachers back. They're going to come down to North Carolina and look those construction workers in the eye and tell them why they can't get to work doing the work that America needs done. They're going to have to come down here and explain to working families why their taxes are going up while the richest Americans and largest corporations keep getting sweet deals in the Tax Code. They're going to have to come down and explain to you why they don't have an answer for how we're putting Americans to work right now.

And if they support the Republican plan, they'll have to explain to you why they'd rather deny health care to millions of Americans and let corporations and banks write their own rules instead of supporting proposals that we know will create jobs right now.

So that's where all of you come in. Some of these folks just aren't getting the message, so I need you to send them a message. I need you to make your voices heard. I need you to give Congress a piece of your mind. These Members of Congress work for you. If they're not delivering, it's time to let them know. It's time to get on the phone and write a letter, tweet, pay a visit. Tell your elected leaders to do the right thing. Remind them what's at stake: putting

people back to work, restoring economic security for middle class families and helping create a ladder for folks who aren't middle class yet to get into the middle class, rebuilding an economy where hard work is valued and responsibility is rewarded, building an economy that lasts for the future and for our children.

If we want to actually lower the deficit and invest in our future, if we want the best roads and best bridges and best airports here in the United States, if we want to continue to invest in our technology and our basic science and research so that we can continue to invent new drugs and make sure the new cars of the future that are running on electricity are made right here in North Carolina and made right here in America, if we want to do all those things, then we got to step up. We got to get to work. We got to get busy right now.

We can't do nothing. Too many folks are hurting out there to do nothing. We need to act right now. We are not a people who sit by and do nothing when things aren't right. We're Americans. If something is not working, we go out there and fix it. We stick with it until the problem is fixed. That's the spirit we need to muster right now.

Let's meet this moment. Let's get to work. Let's show the world once again why the United States is the greatest country on Earth.

God bless you. God bless the United States. And thank you, Asheville. Thank you, North Carolina.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:53 a.m. at Asheville Regional Airport. In his remarks, he referred to Carrie C. Hagan, daughter of Sen. Hagan.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Fletcher, NC.

Locations: Fletcher, NC.

Names: Bellamy, Terry M.; Hagan, Carrie ; Hagan, Kay R.

Subjects: Budget, Federal : Revenue :: Increase; Business and industry : Global competitiveness; Business and industry : Small businesses :: Hiring incentives; Business and industry : Small businesses :: Promotion efforts; Commerce, international : U.S. exports :: Expansion; Congress : Bipartisanship; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Household incomes, decline; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Elections : 2012 Presidential and congressional elections; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Employment and unemployment : Job training assistance; North Carolina : President's visit; South Korea : Free trade agreement with U.S.; Taxation : Tax Code :: Reform; Taxation : Tax relief; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts ; Veterans : Hiring incentives; Virginia : President's visit.

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