

Remarks at Fire Station 5 in Arlington, Virginia
February 3, 2012

The President. Thank you so much. Everybody, please have a seat. Well, good morning, everybody.

Audience members. Good morning!

The President. Jacob, thank you for that introduction. More importantly, thank you for your extraordinary service to our country.

I want to acknowledge two outstanding members of my Cabinet who are here today. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Ric Shinseki is in the house, also one of our finest—[*applause*—]—himself one of our finest veterans and obviously an extraordinary leader when he was in our Army. And I also want to acknowledge Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, who's in the house.

And we're joined by another president, the International Association of Fire Fighters president, Harold Schaitberger, is here.

Now, this is a fire station that holds some special significance for our country. On September 11th, the firefighters of this house were among the first to respond to the attack on the Pentagon. You guys answered this Nation's call during its hour of need. And in the years that followed, as Americans went to war, some of you answered that call as well.

Today's 9/11 generation of veterans has already earned a special place in our history. Our veterans and all the brave men and women who serve our country are the reason why America's military is the greatest in the history of the world. In the face of great odds and grave danger, they get the job done. They work as a team. They personify the very best that America has to offer.

That's true on the battlefield. But we're here today because it's also true on the home front. After a decade of war, our Nation needs to do some building right here in the United States of America.

Now, this morning we received more good news about our economy. In January, American businesses added another 257,000 jobs. The unemployment rate came down because more people found work. And all together, we've added 3.7 million new jobs over the last 23 months.

Now, these numbers will go up and down in the coming months, and there's still far too many Americans who need a job or need a job that pays better than the one they have now. But the economy is growing stronger. The recovery is speeding up. And we've got to do everything in our power to keep it going.

We can't go back to the policies that led to the recession. And we can't let Washington stand in the way of our recovery. We want Washington to be helping with the recovery, not making it tougher.

The most important thing Congress needs to do right now is to stop taxes from going up on 160 million Americans at the end of this month. They've got to renew the payroll tax cut that they extended only for a couple of months. They need to pass an extension of the payroll tax cut and unemployment insurance and do it without drama, without delay, without linking it

to some ideological side issues. They just need to get it done. It shouldn't be that complicated. Now is not the time for self-inflicted wounds to our economy. Now is the time for action.

So I want to send a clear message to Congress: Do not slow down the recovery that we're on. Don't muck it up. Keep it moving in the right direction.

Beyond preventing a tax hike, we need to do a lot more to create an economy that's built to last. To restore American manufacturing, we need to stop giving tax breaks to companies that ship jobs overseas. Give those tax breaks to companies that are investing in plants and equipment and hiring workers right here in the United States of America. That makes a lot of sense.

To reduce our dependency on foreign oil, we need to stop subsidizing oil companies that are already making record profits and double down on clean energy that creates jobs and creates opportunities in new industries, but also improves our security because we're not as dependent on foreign oil.

To make sure our businesses don't have to move overseas to find skilled workers, we've got to invest in education and make sure college is affordable for every hard-working American.

And—this is the reason we're here today—we need to make sure that as our troops return from battle, they can find a job when they get home. That's what I want to talk about today.

The war in Iraq is over. The war in Afghanistan is moving to a new phase; we're transitioning to Afghan lead. Over the past decade, nearly 3 million servicemembers have transitioned back to civilian life, and more are joining them every day.

And when these men and women come home, they bring unparalleled skills and experience. Folks like Jacob, they've saved lives in some of the toughest conditions imaginable. They've managed convoys and moved tons of equipment over dangerous terrain. They've tracked millions of dollars of military assets. They've handled pieces of equipment that are worth tens of millions of dollars. They do incredible work. Nobody is more skilled, more precise, more diligent, more disciplined.

Our veterans are some of the most highly trained, highly educated, highly skilled workers that we've got. These are Americans that every business should be competing to attract. These are the Americans we want to keep serving here at home as we rebuild this country. So we're going to do everything we can to make sure that when our troops come home, they come home to new jobs and new opportunities and new ways to serve their country.

Now, this has been a top priority of mine since I came into office. Already, we've helped 600,000 veterans and their family members go back to school on the post-9/11 GI bill. We've hired over 120,000 veterans to serve in the Federal Government. We've made it easier for veterans to access all sorts of employment services. We've set up online tools to connect veterans with job openings that match their skills.

Michelle and Jill Biden have worked with the private sector, with businesses, to secure a pledge of 135,000 jobs for veterans and their families. And with the support of Democrats and Republicans, we've put in place two new tax credits for companies that hire veterans. So these are all important steps. We've made progress. But we've got to do more. There's more we can do.

In my State of the Union Address, I proposed a new initiative called the Veterans Jobs Corps to put veterans back to work protecting and rebuilding America. And today we're laying out the details of this proposal.

First, we want to help communities hire more veterans as cops and firefighters. You guys have seen what a great job Jacob is doing. Well, there are a whole bunch of folks like that who could be doing that same outstanding work all across the country. But it's not that easy these days to get a job at a firehouse.

Over the past few years, tight budgets have forced a lot of States, a lot of local communities to lay off a lot of first-responders. Now, my administration—when I first came into office, one of the first things we did was, through the Recovery Act, make sure that States and local governments helped—or got the help that they needed to prevent some of these layoffs. And thousands of jobs were saved all across the country.

Harold and I were talking as we came over here. Thousands of firefighter jobs were saved because of the actions we took. But budgets are still tight, and that's a problem we need to fix. Jobs that protect our families and our communities shouldn't be the first on the chopping block. They should be one of our highest priorities as a nation.

Over the past 3 years, my administration has made it possible for States to keep thousands of first-responders on the job. But today we're announcing that communities who make it a priority to recruit veterans will be among the first in line when it comes to getting help from the Federal Government. And I know that's one of the things, Chief, that you've been doing here in Arlington. So we want to prioritize veterans, and we want to help States and local communities hire veterans to firehouses and police stations all across the country.

The second thing we want to do is to connect up to 20,000 veterans with jobs that involve rebuilding local communities or national parks. That's why Ken Salazar is here as the Interior Secretary. He needs some help. And our veterans are highly qualified to help him. They've already risked their lives defending America. They should have the opportunity to rebuild America. We've got roads and bridges in and around our national parks in need of repair. Let's fix them.

Of course, Congress needs to fund these projects. Congress should take the money that we're no longer spending on war, use half of it to pay down our debt, and use the rest to do some nation-building here at home, to improve the quality of life right here in the United States of America and put our veterans to work.

So let's get more cops on the beat. Let's get more rangers in the parks. Let's get more firefighters on call. And in the process, we're going to put more veterans back to work. It's good for our communities, it's good for our economy, and it's good for our country.

And for veterans who want to do something else—maybe put their leadership skills to use starting a small business—we're going to start offering entrepreneurial training to our veterans. We want servicemembers prepared for battle and for professional success when they come home. So we should do all that we can to support our troops and our veterans in helping them start a business, in helping them get a foothold in a fire station like this one and start moving up the ranks, doing outstanding work the way Jacob's been doing.

But we also need to follow their lead. We want to help them, but we should also learn from them. We should remember from our veterans that no matter what the circumstances, those men and women in uniform—a lot like the firefighters in this fire station—work

together, act as a team, finish the job. That's what we've got to do when it comes to our Nation's recovery.

Now, these are challenging times for America, but we've faced challenging times before. On the grounds here you've got a stone from the Pentagon and a beam from the World Trade Center. And that reminds us of our resolve as a people. They remind us that when we come together as one people and as one community and one nation, then we prevail. That's who we are.

This is a nation that exists because generations of Americans worked together to build it. This is a nation where, out of many, we come together as one. Those are the values that every veteran understands. Those are values that this fire station understands. We've got to make sure that we return to those values. And if we do, then I guarantee you we'll remind everybody around the world just why it is the United States is the greatest country on Earth.

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:30 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Jacob Johnson and Chief James H. Schwartz of the Arlington County Fire Department; and Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Fire Station 5 in Arlington, VA.

Locations: Arlington, VA.

Names: Biden, Jill; Johnson, Jacob; Obama, Michelle; Salazar, Kenneth L.; Schaitberger, Harold A.; Schwartz, James H.; Shinseki, Eric K.

Subjects: Afghanistan : Afghan military and security forces; Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : GI bill legislation; Armed Forces, U.S. : Military families; Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Business and industry : Domestic investment, promotion efforts; Business and industry : Small businesses :: Promotion efforts; Congress : Bipartisanship; Economy, national : American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Postsecondary education :: Career training and continuing education; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment insurance; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment rate; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: Promotion efforts; Energy : Foreign sources; Energy : Oil and gas industry :: Subsidies, elimination; Interior, Department of : Secretary; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Presidency, U.S. : State of the Union Address; Taxation : Payroll tax cut; Terrorism : September 11, 2001, attacks; Veterans : Hiring incentives; Veterans : Employment and job training assistance; Veterans : Service and dedication; Veterans Affairs, Department of : Secretary; Virginia : Fire Station 5 in Arlington; Virginia : President's visit.

DCPD Number: DCPD201200077.