Administration of Barack Obama, 2013

Remarks at the Ford Kansas City Assembly Stamping Plant in Liberty, Missouri
September 20, 2013

The President. Hello, Missouri! Everybody give Jordan a big round of applause.

I just want to say about Jordan—third generation Ford employee—she's going to school during the week, works at the plant on the weekends, getting a degree in business management and will be taking Alan's place running the company in about—[*laughter*]—I don't know—oh, it may take a few years. But we're so proud of her. And congratulations for everything that she represents. When you see young people like that who are working so hard, making something of themselves, and are rooted in a community like this one, it really makes you proud.

Before I get started, there are a couple other folks that I want to introduce; they're are working for you day in, day out. First of all, your outstanding Governor, Jay Nixon, and his wife Georganne. The plant might not have been here had it not been for the great work of Jay. So that's important to know.

We've got my outstanding Secretary of Health and Human Services, former Governor of Kansas, Kathleen Sebelius is in the house. She basically just came because her son and his fiancee are here. [*Laughter*] But we're glad she's here.

One of my greatest friends and just a tough, smart, dedicated public servant, Senator Claire McCaskill is here. Give Claire a big round of applause. Your former mayor, preacher, can do everything, Emanuel Cleaver is in the house. Current mayor of Kansas City, Sly James is here. Mayor of Kansas City, Kansas, Mark Holland is here. And the mayor right here in Liberty, Lyndell Brenton and his lovely wife Roxann are here. Where are they? There they are.

Now, when I said I was flying into Kansas City to see an incredible success story in action, I did not think I was going to be talking about the Chiefs. [*Applause*] Before you get carried away, I just want to point out that the Bears are 2–0. [*Laughter*]

Audience members. Boo!

The President. I'm just saying. [*Laughter*] And we're actually able to pass more than 10 yards. [*Laughter*] Just a little trash-talking. We'll see how we're looking at the end of the season.

I want to give special thanks to Ford's CEO. This is one of our outstanding business leaders, has helped to lead Ford to be the number-one automaker in the United States of America, Alan Mulally is here. And we're very proud of him.

It doesn't matter if you've got an outstanding CEO if you don't have outstanding workers. And the President of Local 249, Jeff Wright, is here. Your launch manager, Todd Jaranowski, I really like because he is a Bears and a Sox fan. Come on, give Todd a big round of applause. And I very much appreciate him and some of the other folks showing me around this new stamping plant right here.

Now, you may not be aware of this, but you and I have a little history together. I may roll in a Cadillac these days—[*laughter*]—no, no, but it's not my car, it's—I'm just—I'm renting, just like my house. [*Laughter*] The lease runs out in about 3½ years. [*Laughter*] But before that, I was driving around in a 2008 Ford Escape. It came right off these assembly lines. Some of you might have been involved in building it. It was a great car. Problem is, I got Secret Service about a month after I bought the car, so I've only got 2,000 miles on it. [*Laughter*] It is in mint condition.

So I want to say thank you for building my car. But I also came here to talk about what's got to be the number-one priority in this country, and that is growing our economy, creating new jobs, and making sure that everyone who works hard in America has a chance to get ahead. It's our number-one priority.

Now, some of you remember, 5 years ago, a financial crisis hit Wall Street. It then turned into a devastating recession on Main Street, and it came close to being another Great Depression. By the time I took office, the economy was shrinking at a rate of 8 percent a year. Unprecedented. Our businesses were shedding 800,000 jobs a month. And you had this perfect storm, and millions of Americans lost their jobs, their homes, their savings they had been working a lifetime to get.

But what the recession also showed was the fact that for decades, middle class families had been working harder and harder just to get by, hadn't seen their incomes go up, hadn't seen their wages go up. Manufacturing was moving overseas. And so what built our middle class had been buckling, had been weakening.

And I think if you ask most Americans when the economic crisis hit, they might not date it to Lehman's Brothers collapsing. They'd talk to you about when they got a pink slip that they didn't expect or the bank took away their home or they didn't have health insurance or maybe they were told the plant was shutting down and the assembly line was going quiet. Those were tough times.

Five years ago, plants like this one were closing their doors. And the day I stepped into the Oval Office, the American auto industry, which is the heartbeat of American manufacturing—heartbeat of manufacturing—the auto industry was flatlining. Ford was standing on its own two feet, had made some smart decisions, but Alan will tell you, if GM and Chrysler had gone down, suppliers would go down; dealers would have gone down. And all of that would have had a profound impact on Ford.

I refused to let that happen. So we worked with labor, and we worked with management. Everybody had to make some sacrifices. Everybody put some skin in the game. We bet on the American worker. We bet on you. And today, that bet has paid off because the American auto industry has come roaring back.

The Big Three are all profitable, hiring new workers. You're not just building more cars, you're building better cars, better trucks. Look at what's going on right here at the plant. The new F–150 is built tougher than ever, more fuel efficient than ever. You've got trouble making them fast enough. You had to bring on a third shift of 900 workers just to keep up with demand.

And because Ford invested $1.1 billion in this plant, pretty soon, 1,100 more new workers will be joining you on these assembly lines in good, union jobs, building Ford Transit.

So more jobs building cars, that means more jobs for suppliers. It means more jobs for distributors. It means more jobs for the folks who own the restaurant here in town or the bar, depending on—[*laughter*]. It has an impact on your tax base. It has an impact on the teacher who teaches your kids, the first responder who keeps you safe. All those people are impacted by your success.

And that fundamental idea that when everybody is doing—when some of us are doing well, it's okay, but when everybody has got a stake, that's when things really start rolling, that's at the heart of every decision I've made as President. Because when the middle class does better, we all do better. Shareholders do better. CEOs do better. Workers do better. Everybody does better.

So in the depths of the crisis, we passed a Recovery Act to make sure that we put a floor below which this country couldn't fall. We put money in folks' pockets with tax breaks. We made sure that people were rebuilding roads and bridges, keeping things going, helping to keep teachers and firefighters and cops on the job. Today, 3½ years later, our businesses have added 7½ million new jobs—7½ million new jobs.

We helped responsible homeowners stay in their homes, won one of the biggest settlements in history on behalf of people who had wrongfully lost their homes because banks hadn't done things right. Today, our housing market is healing.

We took on a Tax Code that was too skewed towards the wealthy. We gave tax cuts, locked them in for 98 percent of families. We asked those in the top 2 percent to pay a little bit more. Today, middle class tax rates are near their alltime low. The deficits are falling at the fastest rate since World War II. That's what we did.

We invested in new American technologies to end our addiction to foreign oil. Today, we're generating more renewable energy than ever before, produce more natural gas than anybody in the world. We're about to produce more of our own oil than we buy from overseas for the first time in nearly 20 years.

And we took on a broken health care system. And in less than 2 weeks, millions of Americans who have been locked out of the insurance market are finally going to be able to get quality health care. Out of every 10 Americans who are currently uninsured, 6 out of those 10 are going to be able to get covered for less than a hundred dollars a month, less than your cell phone bill.

So we've been working, just like you've been working, over these last 4½ years. We've cleared away the rubble from the crisis. We've started to lay a new foundation for economic growth, a new foundation for prosperity. And everybody here, we all had to make some adjustments. I'm assuming some folks had to tighten their belts, get rid of some debt, focus on things that really matter, cut out some things you didn't need.

We've shown the world that the American people are tough, they're resilient. The only thing built tougher than Ford trucks are American workers, the American people. That's what we've shown.

All right, so that's the good news. But any working person, any middle class family, they'll tell you we're not yet where we need to be. The economy is growing, but it needs to grow faster. We're producing jobs, but we need to create more jobs and more good-paying jobs. We've got to make sure that we're rebuilding an economy that doesn't work from the top down, works from the middle out; that gives ladder of opportunity to folks who still don't have a job.

We've got to make sure that workers are sharing in growth and productivity. Right now, even though businesses are creating jobs, the top 1 percent took home 20 percent of the Nation's income last year. The average worker barely saw a raise.

Audience member. That's not fair.

The President. It ain't fair; it ain't right.

So in many ways, the trends that have taken hold over the past few years of a winner-take-all economy, a few folks at the top doing better and better and better, everybody else treading water or losing ground, that's not a model that we want. And it's been made worse by this recession.

So what I've been doing over the last couple months, I've been visiting towns like Liberty, traveling all across the country talking about what we need to do to reverse those trends, make sure, we've got a better bargain for middle class America: good jobs that pay good wages, an education that prepares our kids for a global economy, a home that is secure, affordable health care that is there when you get sick, a secure retirement even if you're not rich—all those things that make for a secure life so you can raise your kids and have confidence that they're going to do better than you did. That's what I'm focused on. That's what you're focused on. That's what Congress should be focused on.

Which brings me to the current situation. [*Laughter*] Let me talk a little bit about what's going on back in Washington. Right now Congress is in the middle of a budget debate. Now, there's nothing new about that. Every year Congress has got to pass a budget, and it's always a contentious process. But right now our recovery still needs to build more strength, so it's important that we get it right in Washington, because even though our success as a country is ultimately going to depend on great businesses like Ford, hard workers like you, Government has to do some things.

Congress has to pass a budget to make sure our education system works and prepares our kids and our workers for the global economy. If we're going to rebuild our roads, our bridges, our airports, our ports, Government's got to be involved in that. If we're going to have scientific research and development—I was looking at all these newfangled pieces of equipment here—some of the things that allowed the efficiencies of this plant originated in laboratories and scientists doing work on the Government's dime. That's how we always maintain our cutting edge. These are things that help us grow. These are help—things that help the private sector succeed.

So when people tell you somehow Government is irrelevant, no, everything we do has some connection to making sure that we, collectively, as a democracy, are making some smart investments in the future. That's how it's always been.

So what Congress is doing right now is important. Unfortunately, right now the debate that's going on in Congress is not meeting the test of helping middle class families. It's just, they're not focused on you. They're focused on politics. They're focused on trying to mess with me. [*Laughter*] They're not focused on you. [*Applause*] They're not focused on you.

So there are two deadlines coming up that Congress has to meet. And I want folks to pay attention to this. Congress has to meet two deadlines, and they're coming up pretty quick.

The first deadline: The most basic constitutional duty Congress has is to pass a budget. That's Congress 101. If they don't pass a budget by September 30—what's the date today? The 20th. All right, so if Congress doesn't pass a budget in 10 days, a week from Monday, the

Government will shut down. A Government shutdown shuts down many services that the American people rely on.

This is not abstract. Hundreds of thousands of Americans will not be allowed to go to work. Our men and women in uniform, even those deployed overseas, won't get their paychecks on time. Small businesses, they won't get their loans processed. Now, none of that has to happen, as long as Congress passes a budget. Number one: passing a budget.

Number two, in the next few weeks, Congress must vote to allow the Department of the Treasury to pay America's bills. All right? Our Treasury Department, that's where we take in money and we pay it, right? Real simple. This is usually done with a simple, routine vote to raise what's called the debt ceiling. If you don't raise the debt ceiling, America can't pay its bills.

Since the 1950s, Congress has always passed it. Every President has signed it—Democrats, Republicans, Ronald Reagan—[*laughter*]—Lyndon Johnson—it doesn't matter. This is just a routine thing that you've got to do so that Treasury can pay the bills. If Congress doesn't pass this debt ceiling in the next few weeks, the United States will default on its obligations. That's never happened in American history. Basically, America becomes a deadbeat.

If the world sees America not paying its bills, then they will not buy debt, Treasury bills, from the United States, or if they do, they'll do it at much higher interest rates. That means somebody wanting to buy an F–150 will have to pay much higher interest rates eventually, which means you will sell less cars. That's just one example of how profoundly destructive this could be. This is not some abstract thing.

And this is important: Raising the debt ceiling is not the same as approving more spending, any more than making your monthly payment adds to the total cost of your truck. You don't say, well, I'm not going to pay my bill, my note for my truck because I'm going to save money. No, you're not saving money. You already bought the truck, right? [*Laughter*] You have to pay the bills. You're not saving money. You might have decided at the front end not to buy the truck, but once you've bought the truck, you can't say you're saving money just by not paying the bills. Does that make sense?

So raising the debt ceiling, it doesn't cost a dime. It does not add a penny to our deficits. All it says is, you've got to pay for what Congress already said we're spending money on. If you don't do it, we could have another financial crisis.

And the fact is—I know a lot of people are concerned about deficits—our deficits are now coming down so quickly that by the end of this year, we will have cut them in more than half since I took office—cut deficits in half.

So I just want to break this down one more time. I go into a Ford dealership. I drive off with a new F–150. Unless I paid cash, I've still got to pay for it each month. I can't just say, you know, I'm not going to make my car payment this month. That's what Congress is threatening to do, just saying, I'm not going to pay the bills. There are consequences to that. The bill collector starts calling you, right? Your credit goes south, and you've got all kinds of problems. Same is true for a country.

So if we don't raise the debt ceiling, we're deadbeats. "If we fail to increase the debt limit, we would send our economy into a tailspin"—that's a quote, by the way, what I just said. You know who said it? The Republican Speaker of the House John Boehner. The Republican

Speaker has said if we don't pay our bills, we'll have an economic tailspin. So this is not just my opinion, this is everybody's opinion.

All right. Now, why haven't we already gotten it done if it's such a simple thing? Everybody is nodding; they're all, like, yes, why didn't we already get this done? Democrats and some reasonable Republicans in Congress are willing to raise the debt ceiling and pass a sensible budget. And I want to work with Democrats and Republicans to do just that. Claire McCaskill, she's ready to do it. Congressman Cleaver, he's ready to do it. And if we just pass the budget, raise the debt ceiling, we can get back to focusing on growing this economy and creating jobs, educating our kids—all the things we got to do.

Unfortunately, there is a faction on the far right of the Republican Party right now—it's not everybody, but it's a pretty big faction—who have convinced their leadership to threaten a Government shutdown and potentially threaten to not raise the debt ceiling if they can't shut off the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare.

Now, think about this. They're not talking now about spending cuts. They're not talking about entitlement reform. They're not talking about any of that. Now they're talking about something that has nothing to do with the budget. Right? They're actually willing to plunge America into default if we can't defund the Affordable Care Act.

Now, let's put this in perspective. The Affordable Care Act has been into law for 3½ years. It passed both Houses of Congress. The Supreme Court ruled it constitutional. It was an issue in last year's elections. The guy who was running against me said he was going to repeal it. We won. The—[*applause*]. So the voters were pretty clear on this.

And then, Republicans in Congress, they've tried to repeal or sabotage this; more than 40 times they've had these repeal votes. Every time they fail. This law that is in place is already providing people benefits. It's not holding back economic growth, it's helping millions of Americans, including some of you or your family members that you may not be aware of.

You can keep your kid on your own health insurance plan—somebody is raising their hand right here—until they're 26, because of the Affordable Care Act, which is one of the main reasons why the number of uninsured among young people has gone down over the last 3 years.

Seniors, they are benefiting right now from discounted prescription drug costs because of the law. If you've got health insurance, insurance companies can't impose lifetime limits on you. They can't use the fine print not to pay if you get sick. Insurance companies have to spend 80 percent of your premiums on your health care, not on administrative costs and CEO bonuses. Those are happening right now.

And health care costs have actually increased at the slowest rate in 50 years. So this is helping to reduce health care costs across the economy.

Finally, starting on October 1, it's going to help millions of more people. People who don't have health insurance right now, what it's going to do is, we're going to set up pools so that just like a worker at Ford can benefit from good insurance rates because you got a lot of workers in one big pool; now people who don't have the good fortune to work at a big company like Ford, they can also get a good deal.

Now, that's what—so that's what they're fighting for. They want to repeal all that, and they're saying, we're going to hold our breath, and if you don't repeal it—which, I've already said, I'm not going to do—we're going to send the economy into default. They will send our economy into a tailspin, just like Speaker Boehner said. They want to threaten default just to make sure that tens of millions of Americans continue not to have health care.

Defunding Affordable Health Care would rob 25 million Americans of the chance to get health care coverage. It would cut basic health care services for tens of millions of seniors on Medicare already. That's what House Republicans are fighting for.

And now they've gone beyond just holding Congress hostage, they're holding the whole country hostage. One Republican Senator called shutting down the Government over the Affordable Care Act "the dumbest idea I've ever heard." I agree with him. But that's the strategy they're pursuing. House of Representatives just voted on it today.

Now, I tell you what, Missouri: The American people have worked too hard for too long, digging out of a real crisis just to let politicians in Washington cause another crisis.

This is the United States of America. We're not some banana republic. This is not a deadbeat nation. We don't run out on our tab. We're the world's bedrock investment. The entire world looks to us to make sure the world economy is stable. We can't just not pay our bills. And even threatening something like that is the height of irresponsibility.

So what I've said is I will not negotiate over the full faith and credit of the United States. I am not going to allow anyone to harm this country's reputation—I'm not going to allow them to inflict economic pain on millions of our own people—just so they can make an ideological point.

But I need you to help. I need you to help tell Congress, pay our bills on time. Pass a budget on time. Stop governing from crisis to crisis. Put our focus back on where it should be: on you, the American people; on creating new jobs; on growing our economy; on restoring security for middle class families. That's what you deserve.

I mean, I don't know, it's like they do this every 6 months. [*Laughter*] Isn't it? I mean, I don't mind them disagreeing with me. They don't like the Affordable Care Act, they'd rather have people not have health insurance, I'm happy to have that debate with them. But you don't have to threaten to blow the whole thing up just because you don't get you way. [*Laughter*] Right?

I think about something that Jordan said. Her grandfather worked in this plant; uncle, stepmom worked in this plant. Now she and her brother work in this plant, punching in as part of the next generation of American workers at a great, iconic American company. Our economy is coming back because of the resilience and determination of American workers like Jordan and her family.

And every day, all over this country, there are men and women just like Jordan, just like her brother, they wake up, maybe pack a lunch for their kids, kiss them goodbye, go to work, live up to their responsibilities, do their jobs, pay their bills.

Shouldn't you expect the same thing from people in Washington?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. Shouldn't you expect the same thing from Members of Congress?

Just do your job. Don't be the other guy, be the guy who's doing your job. No obstruction. No games. No holding the economic hostage—the economy hostage if you don't get 100 percent of what you want.

Nobody gets 100 percent of what you want. You guys know that in your own lives, in your own families. I don't know how many people are married here, but you know you better learn not to expect getting 100 percent of what you want. Otherwise, you'll be divorced real quick. [*Laughter*] Especially you men, I'm telling you. [*Laughter*]

So you should expect the same thing, same common sense, out of Congress. You should expect some compassion. You should expect some compromise. You should expect the conviction of leaders who wake up and go to work every day, not to tear something down, but to build something better; not just for today, but for the world we want to leave our kids.

That's my conviction. That's my commitment to you. If we start thinking about you instead of politics and how you can get your base stirred up, then we're going to be able to get back to the point where this country is what we want it to be. If Washington will act with the same decency and common purpose that you and Americans all across the country do every single day, the economy will be stronger not just a year from now or 5 years from now or 10 years from now, but 20 and 30 and 50 years from now.

And as long as I have the privilege of serving you as your President, that's what I'm going to be focused on.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:53 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Jordan Wheeldon, employee, Ford Kansas City Assembly stamping plant; John Sebelius, son of Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius, and his fiancee Allie Hoeme; Jeff Wright, president, UAW Local 249; 2012 Republican Presidential nominee W. Mitt Romney; and Sen. Richard M. Burr.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Ford Kansas City Assembly stamping plant in Liberty, MO.

Locations: Liberty, MO.

Names: Boehner, John A.; Brenton, Lyndell; Brenton, Roxann; Burr, Richard M.; Cleaver, Emanuel, II; Hoeme, Allie; Holland, Mark R.; James, Sylvester; Jaranowski, Todd; McCaskill, Claire; Mulally, Alan; Nixon, Georganne W.; Nixon, Jeremiah W.; Romney, W. Mitt; Sebelius, John; Sebelius, Kathleen; Wheeldon, Jordan; Wright, Jeff.

Subjects: Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Decline; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Strengthening efforts; Congress : Bipartisanship; Congress : House of Representatives :: Speaker; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Government bonds, creditworthiness; Economy, national : Income inequality, increase; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Energy : Domestic sources; Health and Human Services, Department of : Secretary; Health and medical care : Affordability and costs; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Missouri : Ford Kansas City Assembly stamping plant in Liberty; Missouri : Governor; Missouri : President's visit; Sports : Football; Taxation : Tax Code, reform.

DCPD Number: DCPD201300644.