

Administration of Barack Obama, 2013

Remarks at the Port of New Orleans in New Orleans, Louisiana

November 8, 2013

The President. Hello, Big Easy! Everybody, give it up for Nancy for that great introduction. It is good to be back in New Orleans. I can't—this is what passes for winter here in New Orleans, huh? *[Laughter]* Folks got all their coats on and all that. Come on. You need to go to Chicago to know what it's like to be cold.

It is great to be here. It is especially happy for my staff. They love coming to New Orleans. But we did schedule the event early because I figured there's a limit to how much trouble they could get into. *[Laughter]* They can't get over to Bourbon Street fast enough if we did a daytime event. And I know that there are probably a couple of my staff that are LSU fans. I wouldn't mind staying for the game tomorrow night. I know we've got the president here; I just saw him a minute ago, and I wished him all the best.

I also want to acknowledge a couple of other people who are here. You've got your Governor, Bobby Jindal is here. We've got the Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx, who is here. We have Cedric Richmond, your outstanding Congressman. Cedric then brought down a whole bunch of his colleagues from the Congressional Black Caucus for some important work that they're doing, not that they're going to enjoy themselves at all while they're here. *[Laughter]* But we are thrilled to see them all here.

You have one of the best mayors in the country in Mitch Landrieu. And I just flew down with your Senator, who, by coincidence, has the same name: Mary Landrieu. She's traveling around the State today and doing unbelievable work on behalf of the people of Louisiana. And I just want to say, nobody is a tougher advocate on behalf of the working people of Louisiana than Mary Landrieu. So we're very, very proud of the work that she does.

Now, finally, I want to thank Mr. Larry—Gary LaGrange, Keith Palmisano, and Chris Hammond. They showed me around the port. And this is one of the—by the way, anybody who's got a seat, feel free. I noticed that a few folks are standing up. If you don't have a seat, then keep on standing. I don't want you hurting yourself.

This is one of the busiest port complexes in the entire world. You move millions of tons of steel and chemicals and fuel and food every single year. I just found out, you also handle a lot of the country's coffee, which means you're responsible for keeping the White House awake at all times. *[Applause]* Got some coffee folks here. *[Laughter]*

And in so many ways, this port is representative of what ports all around the country do: They help to keep our economy going: moving products, moving people, making sure that businesses are working. You've got corn and wheat that's coming down from my home State of Illinois down the river, ending up here, and then going all around the world. And it's part of the reason why we've been able to increase exports so rapidly, is because we've got some of the best natural resources and waterways and facilities in the world.

Now, growing our economy, creating new jobs, helping middle class families regain a sense of stability and security so they can find good jobs and make sure that their kids are doing even better than they did—now, that's always been what America is about, but for too many people, that sense that you can make it here if you try, that sense has been slipping away. And my driving focus has been to restore that sense of security, and it should be Washington's

focus, regardless of party. That's what everybody in Washington should be thinking about every day.

So today I want to just offer a couple of ideas about what we could do right now together that would help our economy, right now. Now, the good news is, over the past 44 months, our businesses have created 7.8 million new jobs. Since I took office, we've cut the deficits in half. [Applause] That's right. By the way, you wouldn't know this sometimes listening to folks on TV, but the deficits are going down, they're not going up. They've been cut in half. And they are—they keep on going down.

Over the past 3 years, health care costs have risen at the slowest pace on record. Exports are up. The housing market is up. The American auto industry is roaring back. So we've got a lot of good things to build on, but we've got a lot more work to do. And what we should start doing—the first thing we should do—is stop doing things that undermine our businesses and our economy over the past few years, this constant cycle of manufactured crises and self-inflicted wounds that have been coming out of Washington.

For example, we learned yesterday that over the summer, our economy grew at its fastest pace in a year. That's the good news. The bad news is that the very day that the economic quarter ended, some folks in Washington decided to shut down the Government and threatened to default on America's obligations for the first time in more than 200 years. And it's like, the gears of our economy, every time they are just about to take off, suddenly, somebody taps the brakes and says, not so fast.

Audience member. Tell it! [Laughter]

The President. Now, our businesses are resilient. We've got great workers. And so, as a consequence, we added about 200,000 new jobs last month. But there's no question that the shutdown harmed our jobs market. The unemployment rate still ticked up. And we don't yet know all the data for this second—this final quarter of the year, but it could be down because of what happened in Washington. Now, that makes no sense. These self-inflicted wounds don't have to happen. They should not happen again.

We should not be injuring ourselves every few months, we should be investing in ourselves. We should be building, not tearing things down. Rather than refighting the same old battles again and again and again, we should be fighting to make sure everybody who works hard in America and hard right here in New Orleans, that they have a chance to get ahead. That's what we should be focused on.

Which brings me to one of the reasons I'm here at this port. One of the things we should be focused on is helping more businesses sell more products to the rest of the world. And the only way those products get out is through facilities like this. Right now exports are one of the brightest spots in our economy. Thanks in part to new trade deals that we signed with countries like Panama and Colombia and South Korea, we now export more goods and services than ever before. And that means jobs right here in the United States of America.

Last year, every \$1 billion in exports supports nearly 5,000 jobs, including jobs right here at this port. So we're working on new trade deals that will mean more jobs for our workers and more business for ports like this one.

And by the way, I—when I travel around the world, I'm out there selling. I'll go anywhere in the world to make sure that those products stamped with those words "Made in America," that we can open up those markets and sell them anywhere.

So helping American businesses grow, creating more jobs—these are not Democratic or Republican priorities, they are priorities that everybody, regardless of party, should be able to get behind. And that's why, in addition to working with Congress to grow our exports, I've put forward additional ideas where, I believe, Democrats and Republicans can join together to make progress right now.

Number one, Congress needs to pass a farm bill that helps rural communities grow and protects vulnerable Americans. For decades, Congress found a way to compromise and pass farm bills without fuss. For some reason, now Congress can't even get that done. Now, this is not something that just benefits farmers. Ports like this one depend on all the products coming down the Mississippi. So let's do the right thing: Pass a farm bill. We can start selling more products. That's more business for this port. And that means more jobs right here.

Number two, we should fix our broken immigration system. This would be good for our national security, but it would also be good for our economic security. Over the next two decades, it would grow our economy by \$1.4 trillion. It would shrink our deficits by nearly a trillion dollars. This is—this should not be a partisan issue. President Bush proposed the broad outlines of commonsense immigration reform almost a decade ago. When I was in the Senate, I joined 23 of my Republican colleagues to back those reforms. This year, the Senate has already passed a bill with broad bipartisan support.

So all we're doing now is waiting for the House to act. I don't know what the holdup is. But if there's a good reason not to do it, I haven't heard it. There's no reason both parties can't come together: Get this done this year. *[Applause]* Get it done this year.

Number three, Democrats and Republicans should work together on a responsible budget that sets America on a stronger course for the future. We shouldn't get caught up in the same old fights. And we shouldn't just cut things just for the sake of cutting things. Remember, I want to remind you: What's happening to the deficits? They're going down. They're shrinking. They're falling faster than they have in 60 years.

So what we have to do now is do what America has always done: make some wise investments in our people and in our country that will help us grow over the long term. We should close wasteful tax loopholes that don't help our jobs, don't grow our economy, and then invest that money in things that actually do create jobs and grow our economy. And one of those things is building new roads and bridges and schools and ports. That creates jobs. It puts people to work during the construction phase. And then it creates an infrastructure for our economy to succeed moving forward.

Educating our kids, training our workers so they're prepared for the global economy, that helps us grow. We should be investing in that. And Mayor Landrieu has been doing a great job in improving education here in New Orleans.

Investing in science and research and technology, that keeps our businesses and our military at our cutting edge. That's the kind of investment we should be making.

I mean, think about our infrastructure. In today's global economy, businesses are going to take root and grow wherever there's the fastest, most reliable transportation and communications networks; they can go anywhere. So China is investing a whole lot in infrastructure. Europe is investing a whole lot in infrastructure. And Brazil is investing a whole lot in infrastructure. What are we doing?

We're doing some good things locally here. The State and city are trying to do some work, but nationally, we're falling behind. We're relying on old stuff. I don't think we should have just old stuff, we should have some new stuff that is going to help us grow and keep pace with global competition.

Rebuilding our transportation and communications networks is one of the fastest ways to create good jobs. And consider that just a couple of years from now, we're going to have new supertankers that are going to start coming through the Panama Canal, and these tankers can hold three times as much cargo as today's. If a port can't handle those supertankers, they'll go load and unload cargo somewhere else. So there's work that we can start doing in terms of dredging and making the passageways deeper, which means the supertankers can have more stuff on them, which means they can unload and load more stuff, which makes this port more competitive.

So why wouldn't we put people to work upgrading them? Why wouldn't we do that? It's not just our ports either. One in nine of our bridges is rated structurally deficient. More than 40 percent of our major highways are congested; so is our airspace. Everybody who's sitting on a tarmac wondering why it is that you're not taking off and getting aggravated when you go fly someplace, part of the reason is, we've got this antiquated air traffic control system. We need the next-generation air traffic control system. It would reduce time travel; it would reduce delays. It reduces fuel costs for airlines. It reduces pollution in the sky. We know how to do it, we just haven't done it.

That shouldn't be a Democratic or a Republican issue. That's just smart to go ahead and do it, something that people across the political spectrum should be able to agree on. Now, here's the thing: All these opportunities and challenges, they're not going to magically fix themselves. We've got to do it. And anybody who says we can't afford to pay for these things needs to realize we're already paying for them.

I'll give you an example. A lot of trucking companies now reroute their shipments to avoid traffic and unsafe bridges. So they're going longer than they need to; that costs them money. So you're paying for it. Those costs then get passed on to consumers. Or it means companies aren't making as much of a profit and maybe they've got fewer employees. So directly or indirectly, we're paying for it. And the longer we delay, the more we'll pay.

So the sooner we take care of business, the better. And I know that if there's one thing that Members of Congress from both parties want, it's smart infrastructure projects that create good jobs in their district.

So that's why, last year, I took the step—without Congress—to speed up the permitting process for big infrastructure projects like upgrading our ports. Just cut through the redtape, get it done faster. This year, rebuilding our infrastructure could be part of a bipartisan budget deal. A couple months ago, I put forward an idea to try to break through some of the old arguments, a grand bargain for middle class jobs. And what I said was, we'll simplify our corporate Tax Code, close some—close wasteful tax loopholes, end incentives to ship jobs overseas, lower tax rates for businesses that create jobs here in the United States, and use some of the money we save by switching to a smarter tax system to create good construction jobs building the things that our businesses need right here in America. It's a pretty sensible deal.

So we—if we took that step, we could modernize our air traffic control system to keep planes running on time, modernize our power grids and pipelines so they survive storms,

modernize our schools to prepare our kids for jobs of the future, modernize our ports so they can accommodate the new ships.

Point is, rebuilding our infrastructure or educating our kids, funding basic research—they are not partisan issues, they're American issues. There used to be a broad consensus that these things were important to our economy. And we've got to get back to that mindset. We've got to move forward on these things together. It doesn't mean that there aren't going to be disagreements on a whole bunch of stuff, but let's work on the things we agree on.

Now, I'm going to make one last point. One area where we haven't made much bipartisan progress—at least not as much as I'd like—is fixing our broken health care system. And I took up this cause knowing it was hard—there was a reason why no other President had done it—to make sure every American has access to quality, affordable health care and to make sure that no American ever again has to fear one illness is going to bankrupt them.

And the work we've already done has resulted in, over the past 3 years, health care costs rising at the slowest pace on record. Health care costs for businesses are growing about one-third of the rate they were a decade ago, and we want those trends to continue.

Now, we've had this problem with the web site. I'm not happy about that. But we're working overtime to make sure that it gets fixed, because right now we've put in place a system, a marketplace, where people can get affordable health care plans. I promise you, nobody has been more frustrated. I wanted to go in and fix it myself, but I don't write code, so—[laughter].

But to every American with a preexisting condition who's been waiting for the day they could be covered just like everybody else, for folks who couldn't afford to buy their own insurance because they don't get it on the job, we're going to fix the web site. Because the insurance plans are there. They are good, and millions of Americans are already finding that they'll gain better coverage for less cost, and it's the right thing to do.

Now, I know that's—I know health care is controversial, so there's only going to be so much support we get on that on a bipartisan basis; until it's working really well, and then they're going to stop calling it Obamacare. [Laughter] They're going to call it something else.

One thing, though, I was talking to your mayor and your Governor about, though, is a separate issue, which is one of the things that the Affordable Care Act does is allow States to expand Medicaid to cover more of their citizens.

And here in Louisiana, that would benefit about 265,000 people. And already, you've seen States—Arkansas has covered—taken this up, and they're covering almost 14 percent of their uninsured. Republican Governors in States like Ohio and Nevada, Arizona, they're doing it, too. Oregon has already reduced the number of uninsured by about 10 percent. And some of these folks opposed Obamacare, but they did support helping their citizens who can't get coverage.

So we want to work with everybody—mayor, Governor, insurance—whoever it is that wants to work with us here in Louisiana to make sure that even if you don't support the overall plan, let's at least go ahead and make sure that the folks who don't have health insurance right now and can get it through an expanded Medicaid. Let's make sure we do that. [Applause] It's the right thing to do.

And one of the reasons to do it is—I've said this before; sometimes, people don't fully appreciate it—we already pay for the health care of people who don't have health insurance, we just pay for the most expensive version, which is when they go to the emergency room.

Because what happens is, the hospitals have to take sick folk. They're not just going to leave them on the streets. But people who are sick, they wait till the very last minute. It's much more expensive to treat them. Hospitals have to figure out how to get their money back, which means, they jack up costs for everybody who does have health insurance by about a thousand dollars per family.

So, as a consequence, what happens is, you're already paying a hidden tax for a broken health care system. Community hospitals struggle to care for the uninsured who can't pay their bills when they get sick. So it's the right thing to do for the health of our economies as a whole. It is a practical, pragmatic reason to do it. It has nothing to do with politics or ideology. And the more States that are working together—Democrats and Republicans—the better off we're going to be.

So bottom line is, New Orleans, we can work together to do these things, because we've done them before. We did not become the greatest nation on Earth just by chance, just by accident. We had some advantages: really nice real estate here in the United States. But what we also had were people who, despite their differences—and we come from everywhere and look different and have different traditions—we understand that this country works best when we're working together. And we decided to do what was necessary for our businesses and our families to succeed. And if we did it in the past, we can do it again.

So let's make it easier for more businesses to expand and grow and sell more goods made in America to the rest of the world. Let's make sure we've got the best ports and roads and bridges and schools. Let's make sure our young people are getting a great education. Let's give everybody a chance to get ahead, not just a few at the top, but everybody, because if we do that, if we help our businesses grow and our communities thrive and our children reach a little higher, then the economy is going to grow faster.

We'll rebuild our middle class stronger. The American Dream will be real and achievable: not just for a few, but for everybody; not just today, but for decades to come. That's what we're fighting for. That's what you're all about here at this port and here in New Orleans. And I'm looking forward to working with you to make sure we keep that up. All right?

Thank you. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:32 p.m. at the Nashville Avenue Break Bulk Terminal. In his remarks, he referred to Nancy Richard, employee, and Gary P. LaGrange, president and chief executive officer, Port of New Orleans; F. King Alexander, president and chancellor, Louisiana State University; Keith Palmisano, general manager, Ports America Louisiana; Christopher Hammond, stevedore, International Longshoremen's Association; former President George W. Bush; Gov. John R. Kasich of Ohio; Gov. Brian E. Sandoval of Nevada; and Gov. Janice K. Brewer of Arizona.

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Locations: New Orleans, LA.

Names: Alexander, F. King; Brewer, Janice K.; Bush, George W.; Foxx, Anthony R.; Hammond, Chris; Jindal, Piyush "Bobby"; Kasich, John R.; LaGrange, Gary P.; Landrieu, Mary L.; Landrieu, Mitchell J.; Palmisano, Keith; Richard, Nancy; Richmond, Cedric L.; Sandoval, Brian E.

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