

Administration of Barack Obama, 2013

Remarks at ArcelorMittal Cleveland in Cleveland, Ohio

November 14, 2013

The President. Hey! Hello, Ohio! Well, it is good to be back in Cleveland. The last time I was here was about a year ago, in the final days of the campaign. I know how much you miss hearing how I approve this message every night on TV. [*Laughter*] I will say it is nice to be here when the only real battle for Ohio is the Browns-Bengals game this Sunday. He's got the Browns shirt right here, Browns cap. [*Laughter*]

Audience member. Yes, sir!

The President. The—I want to thank Scotty for that terrific introduction. Give him a big round of applause. He was a natural. I want to thank your CEO, Lakshmi Mittal, for investing in America and the Cleveland area. We appreciate him. And I want to thank all of you for having me here today.

Along with me, there are a couple of people I just want to acknowledge. First of all, America's Secretary of Energy, Ernie Moniz, is here. Right there. And Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur is here. Give Marcy a big round of applause. Fighting for working people every day.

And earlier this afternoon I had a chance to see your mayor, Frank Jackson; your county executive, Ed FitzGerald. And I want—even though they're not here, I want to thank them for the great work they're doing on behalf of working people throughout the region.

And then finally, I want to thank Mark and Gary for showing me one of the biggest steel plants in America. They told me that folks are proud to have been making steel right here for a century—a hundred years—right here. And they explained that, today, you—the steel you make is some of the strongest you'll find anywhere in the world. This is one of the most productive plants in the world. Best workers in the world.

And what's remarkable is, when you think about it, go back to where this plant was just a few years ago: Economy was in a free fall, auto industry on the brink of collapse. And that meant demand for steel had dried up. The blast furnaces went quiet. About 1,200 steelworkers punched out for what might have been the last time. And that all came at the end of a decade when the middle class was already working harder and harder just to get by and nearly one in three American manufacturing jobs had vanished, a lot of them going overseas. And that could have devastated this community for good.

But we rolled up our sleeves, we made some tough choices. We rescued and retooled the American auto industry; it saved more than a million jobs. We bet on American ingenuity and American workers. And assembly lines started humming again, and automakers started to make cars again. And just a few months after this plant shut down, your plant manager got the call: Fire those furnaces back up, get those workers back on the job. And over the last 4 years, you've made yourselves one of the most productive steel mills not just in America, but in the world. [*Applause*] In the world.

So you retooled to make the strongest steel that goes into newer, better American cars and trucks. You created new partnerships with schools and community colleges to make sure that folks who work here have the high skill—high-tech skills they need for the high-tech jobs,

because I was looking around this factory, and there's a whole bunch of computer stuff going on and—[laughter].

One of your engineers—and I want to make sure I get Margaret's name right here—Margaret Krolkowski. Did I get that right, Margaret? Where's Margaret? Where is she? There is she is back there. So I'm going to quote you, I'm going to quote you. Here's what Margaret said: "When we came back, we wanted to make sure we were in a position where we never shut down again." Never shut down again. And that means making sure that workers here are constantly upgrading their skills and investments being made in the state-of-the-art technology.

And it was interesting, when I was meeting a number of the folks who were giving me the tour—folks who have been here 30 years, 40 years—but obviously, the plant has changed, and so during that period, they've had to upgrade their skills. That's what's happened. And that—and the story of this plant is the story of America over the last 5 years. We haven't just been recovering from a crisis, what we've been trying to do is rebuild a new foundation for growth and prosperity to protect ourselves from future crises. And because of the grit and resilience and optimism of the American people, we're seeing comeback stories like yours all across America.

Over the last 44 months, our businesses have created 7.8 million new jobs. Last month, another 200,000 Americans went back to work. And a lot of those jobs are in manufacturing. So now we've got to do more to get those engines of the economy churning even faster. But because we've been willing to do some hard things—not just kick the can down the road—factories are reopening their doors, businesses are hiring new workers, companies that were shipping jobs overseas, they're starting to talk about bringing those jobs back to America. We're starting to see that.

And let me give you an example, because we were talking about this; Mr. Mittal and others were talking about what's different now. Take a look at what we've done with American energy. For years, folks have talked about reducing our dependence on foreign oil, but we didn't really do it. And we were just importing more and more oil, sending more and more money overseas. Gas prices keep on going up and up and up. We finally decided we were going to do something about it.

So we invested in new American technologies to reverse our addiction to foreign oil, double wind power, double solar power, produce more oil, produce more natural gas, and do it all in a way that is actually bringing down some of our pollution, making our entire economy more energy efficient. Today, we generate more renewable energy than ever. We produce more natural gas than anybody in the world. Just yesterday we learned that for the first time since 1995, the United States of America produces more of our own oil here at home than we buy from other countries. [Applause] First time since 1995. And that's a big deal. That's what America has done these past 5 years.

And that is a huge competitive advantage for us. Part of the reason companies now want to move—we were just talking about it—this plant, if it's located in Germany, energy costs are double, maybe triple; same in Japan. So this gives us a big edge. But this is also important: We reached the milestone not just because we're producing more energy, but also, we're wasting less energy. And this plant's a good example of it. We set new fuel standards that double the distance our cars and trucks go on a gallon of gas by the middle of the next decade. That saves the average driver—everybody here—more than \$8,000 at the pump over the life of a new car. You like that? [Applause] We launched initiatives to put people to work upgrading our homes, and our businesses, and our factories so we're wasting less energy. All that saves businesses

money on their energy bills. Your plant is one of the hundreds to answer that call. And if you're saving money on energy costs, that means you can invest in equipment, invest in workers, hire more people, produce more product.

And here's another thing: Between more clean energy, less wasted energy, the carbon pollution that's helping to warm the planet, that actually starts going down. And that's good news for anybody who cares about leaving a planet to our kids that is as beautiful as the one we got from our parents and our grandparents. So it's a win-win. Our economy keeps growing, creating new jobs, which means that strengthening our energy security and increasing energy efficiency doesn't have to be a choice between the environment and the economy. We can do both.

So we've tackled the way we use energy. That's making America more competitive in order to attract good jobs. We've also tackled our deficits. A lot of people have been concerned about deficits. Since I took office, we cut them in half. That makes America more attractive when it comes to business investment decisions.

And we've tackled a broken health care system. Obviously, we're not done yet. [Applause] Obviously, we're not done yet. But over the last 3 years, health care costs have grown at the slowest pace on record. And this is a great place to work thanks to a great steelworkers union and cooperation between management and labor. But just keep in mind that if businesses' health care costs are growing at about one-third the rate that they were a decade ago, that makes America a more affordable place to do business, and it also means that the investors here, if they're putting less money into health care costs, they can put more money in terms of hiring more workers and making sure that they're getting good pay.

So that's what all these tough decisions are about: Reversing the forces that have hurt the middle class for a long, long time and building an economy where anybody, if you work hard, you can get ahead. That's what plants like this have always been about. It's not that it's easy work. But it means if you work hard, you've got a chance to buy a home, you've got a chance to retire, you've got a chance to send your kids to school, you have a chance to maybe take a little vacation once in a while. That's what people strive for. And that's what will make the 21st century an American century, just like the last century was.

But I didn't run for President to go back to where we were. I want us to go forward. I want us to go towards the future. I want us to get us to where we need to be. I want to solve problems, not just put them off. I want to solve problems. And we've got to do more to create more good, middle class jobs like the ones folks have here.

That means we've got to do everything we can to prepare our children and our workers for the competition that they're going to face. We should be doing everything we can to help put some sort of advanced education within reach for more young people. Not everybody has got to go to a 4-year college, but just looking at the equipment around here, you've got to have a little bit of advanced training. It may come through a community college, or it may come through a technical school, but we've got to make sure you can get that education, your kids can get that education, without going broke—[applause]—without going broke, without going into debt. So we're working on that.

Another thing we should be working on: fixing a broken immigration system. When you think about this whole region, a lot of folks forget, but almost everybody who worked in that plant a hundred years ago came from someplace else. And so we've got now a new generation of hopeful, striving immigrants; we've got to make sure that they come legally and that we do

what we need to secure our borders, but we've also got to make sure that we're providing them opportunity just like your parents, grandparents, great-grandparents received when they arrived at this plant. And that's important. And by the way, it will help our economy grow, because then they're paying taxes and helping to invest and build here in America.

We should do everything we can to revitalize American manufacturing. Manufacturing is—that's the hub of our economy. When our manufacturing base is strong, the entire economy is strong. A lot of service jobs depend on servicing manufacturing jobs. And typically, manufacturing jobs pay a little bit better. So that's been a path, a ticket to the middle class. So when we make steel and cars, make them here in America, that helps. Like I said, work may be hard, but it gives you enough money to buy a home and raise a kid, retire and send your kids to school.

And those kinds of jobs also tell us something else. It's not just how much you get in your paycheck, it's also a sense of, "I'm making something, and I'm helping to build this country." It helps establish a sense of—that we're invested in this country. It tells us what we're worth as a community. One of your coworkers, Mike Longa—where's Mike?

Audience member. Right here.

The President. Is he back here? That's Mike right there. Mike grew up here. His mom and dad worked at this plant. This plant helped put Mike and four brothers and/or sisters through college. And once this plant started growing again, Mike got his chance to be a steelworker here and provide for his own two young kids. So it's a generational thing, and I want to keep that going.

In my State of the Union Address, I talked about how we created America's first manufacturing innovation institute right here in Ohio. Marcy Kaptur has been a big proponent of this because she knows how important manufacturing is. I want to create more of them: places where businesses are working with universities and they're partnering to figure out what are the new manufacturing techniques that keep us at the cutting edge so that China or Germany don't get ahead of us in terms of the equipment that's being invested. We want to be at the cutting edge so what we're producing is always the best steel, it's always the best cars. But that requires research and investment.

And your Senator Sherrod Brown helped us to create that first manufacturing hub in Youngstown. And he's now leading a bipartisan effort with Senator Blunt of Missouri to move more of these manufacturing innovation hubs all across the country. And Congress should pass Sherrod's bill. We should be doing everything we can to guarantee the next revolution in manufacturing happens right here in Cuyahoga, happens right here in Ohio, happens right here in America.

And let me make one last point. We have to do everything we can to make sure every American has access to quality, affordable health care, period. You may have read, we had some problems last month with web sites. I'm not happy about that. And then I had a press conference today, and I said, you know what, we fumbled the ball in terms of the rollout.

But we always knew this was going to be hard. There's a reason why folks had tried to do it for a hundred years and hadn't done it. And it's complicated. There are a lot of players involved. The status quo is entrenched. And so yes, there's no question, the rollout on the Affordable Care Act was much tougher than we expected. But I want everybody here to understand, I am going to see this through. I want millions of Americans to make sure that

they're not going broke when they get sick and they can go to a doctor when their kid gets sick. And we're not apologizing for that. We are going to get this done.

So we're going to get the web site working the way it's supposed to. The plans are already out there that are affordable, and people can get tax credits. We're going to help folks whose old plans have been canceled by the insurers—many of them weren't very good—and we're going to make sure that they can get newer, better options.

But we're not going to go back to the old system because the old system was broken. And every year, thousands of Americans would get dropped by—dropped from coverage or denied their medical history or exposed to financial ruin. You guys are lucky that you work at a company with a strong union that gives you good health benefits. But you know friends and family members who don't have it, and you know what it's like when they get sick. You know what it's—how scary it is for them when they get sick. Or some of them have health insurance—they think they do—and they get sick, and suddenly, the insurance company says: "Oh, I'm sorry, you owe \$50,000. That's not covered." Or they jack up your premium so you can't afford it because you had some sort of preexisting condition. That happens every day.

So we're not going to let that happen. We're not going to let folks who pay their premiums on time get jerked around. And we're not going to walk away from the 40 million Americans without health insurance. We are not going to gut this law. We will fix what needs to be fixed, but we're going to make the Affordable Care Act work. And those who say they're opposed to it and can't offer a solution, we'll push back.

I got to give your Governor a little bit of credit. John Kasich, along with a lot of State legislators who are here today, they expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. And think about that. Just that one step means as many as 275,000 Ohioans are going to have health insurance. And it doesn't depend on a web site. That's already happening because of the Affordable Care Act.

And I think it's fair to say that the Governor didn't do it because he just loves me so much. [*Laughter*] I mean, we don't agree on much, but he saw: well, this makes sense. Why wouldn't we do this? Why wouldn't we make sure that hundreds of thousands of people right here in Ohio have some security? It was the right thing to do. And by the way, if every Republican Governor did what Kasich did here rather than play politics about it, you'd have another 5.4 million Americans who could get access to health care next year, regardless of what happens with the web site. That's their decision not to do it. And it's the wrong decision. They've got to go ahead and sign folks up.

So the bottom line is, sometimes, we just have to set aside the politics and focus on what's good for people. What's good to grow our middle class? What's going to help keep plants like this growing? What's going to make sure we're putting more people back to work? What's going to really make a difference in terms of our kids getting a great education?

And look, we've done it before. That's the good news. The good news is that America is—look, we make mistakes. We have our differences. Our politics get screwed up sometimes. Web sites don't work sometimes. [*Laughter*] But we just keep going.

Audience members. That's right.

The President. We didn't become the greatest nation on Earth by accident. We did it because we did what it took to make sure our families could succeed, make sure our businesses

could succeed, make sure our communities could succeed. And if you don't believe me, listen to one of your coworkers.

So Sherrod Brown, earlier this year, brought a special guest along with him to the State of the Union Address, one of your coworkers, Cookie Hall. Where's Cookie? Is Cookie here?

Audience member. No, she's back at the hall.

The President. She's back at the hall working. [*Laughter*] Well, let me say something nice about her behind her back. [*Laughter*] So Cookie said, one of—let me make sure I can find this. She said—that night she said: "If I get a chance to meet President Obama, I'll tell him my greatest pride is in our 12,000—2012 production record at Cleveland Works. We're the most productive steelworkers in the world." More than a ton of steel produced for every single one of the workers at this plant. That's pretty good. [*Applause*] That's pretty good.

So all of you are an example of what we do when we put our minds to it. This plant was closed for a while. We go through hard times. And a lot of our friends are still going through hard times. But when we work at it, we know we can get to a better place, and we can restore some security to a middle class that was forged in plants just like this one and keep giving ladders of opportunity for folks who were willing to work hard to get into the middle class. That's what I'm about. That's what this plant is about. I'm proud to be with you.

And as long as I have the honor of being your President, I'm going to be waking up every single day thinking about how I can keep on helping folks like the ones who work in this plant.

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:38 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Thomas Scott and Cookie Hall, steelworkers, Lakshmi N. Mittal, chairman and chief executive officer, Mark Kovach, finishing division manager, Gary L. Grimes, Sr., safety advocate, and Margaret Krolikowski, finishing quality manager, ArcelorMittal.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : ArcelorMittal Cleveland in Cleveland, OH.

Locations: Cleveland, OH.

Names: Blunt, Roy A.; Brown, Sherrod C.; FitzGerald, Edward; Grimes, Gary L., Sr.; Hall, Cookie; Jackson, Frank G.; Kaptur, Marcia C.; Kasich, John R.; Kovach, Mark; Krolikowski, Margaret; Longa, Mike; Mittal, Lakshmi N.; Moniz, Ernest J.; Scott, Thomas.

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Environment : Quality and improvement efforts; Health and medical care : Affordability and costs; Health and medical care : Health insurance exchanges; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Ohio : ArcelorMittal Cleveland in Cleveland; Ohio : Governor; Ohio : President's visit; Science and technology : Research and development.

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