

Remarks Prior to a Cabinet Meeting

November 7, 2014

Well, this morning we learned that in October our businesses added 209,000 new jobs. The unemployment rate fell again. Our private sector has now added 10.6 million new jobs over the last 56 months, and this is the strongest job growth that we have seen since the 1990s.

And all this is a testament to the hard work and resilience of the American people. They have been steady and strong digging themselves out of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. And what we need now to do is to make sure that we build on this momentum, because we recognize that despite the solid growth, despite the drop in unemployment, there are still a lot of folks out there who are anxious about their futures, who are having trouble making ends meet at the end of the month or saving for their kids' college education or being able to make sure that they're able to retire with dignity and respect. And so everything that we do over the next 2 years is designed and geared towards ensuring that folks who work hard in this country are able to get ahead.

Now, obviously, we've had a significant midterm election. As I said at the press conference, my attitude has been and will continue to be that good ideas don't necessarily come from just one party. And I'm looking forward to seeing the leaders of both Democratic and Republican caucuses this afternoon to have a chance to share with them both what I think we need to be doing to build on the economic momentum that we already have and make it even stronger, but I'm also going to be interested in listening to them in terms of areas where we think it's possible to work together, whether that is putting people back to work through stronger manufacturing here in the United States and selling more to countries around the world, one of the major topics that we're going to be discussing during my Asia trip next week; whether it's figuring out how we can build on some modest new investments that we've been making in early childhood education. We know that works. And there's strong bipartisan support around the country for some of those investments. Let's see if we can do more.

All these issues are ones in which there's a strong possibility of bipartisan cooperation, as long as we set politics aside for a moment and focus on the people who actually sent us here.

In the meantime, in these regular meetings that I'm having with my Cabinet, I've been emphasizing to them from day one and will reiterate in this meeting the fact that separate and apart from legislative activity, we have the capacity to continually improve how we deliver services to the American people. I think part of what's happened over a course of several decades is that people sometimes feel as if the Federal Government is distant, that it's not customer friendly, that there's too much bureaucracy.

And because of the fine work of many of the members of this Cabinet, what we've been able to do is start chipping away at some of the old ways of doing business and start instituting new ways of doing business that improve customer service, that make sure that people are getting the help they need.

This week, I had a chance to welcome and have a conversation with our new Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Bob McDonald, who is coming from the private sector, but also is coming from West Point and an extraordinary legacy of service in our Armed Forces. And what we're already seeing is that Bob is able to start skinning down the wait times for people in terms of

getting appointments that they need, but also building on successes that have been taking place over the last several years, reducing homelessness, for example. With our HUD Secretaries Donovan and now Castro, we've reduced veterans homelessness by 30 percent. And a lot of that's not by virtue of new legislation, it's just by us focusing more on these problems and managing them better and continually listening to the American people to see how we can be more helpful.

So there are a lot of opportunities for us to do that here today. We're going to, I think, take an inventory of the progress that's being made in various departments. We're also going to focus on the fact that between now and the end of the year there's still some immediate work that needs to be done.

We have made progress in building the kind of public health infrastructure we need to deal with any eventualities with respect to Ebola, but it is still a concern both here domestically but most importantly, still a concern internationally. So we'll get reports from Sylvia Burwell as well as Susan Rice and others who have been actively involved in that fight. And Ron Klain, who's here, will tell us how the work we need to be doing with Congress can help advance and ultimately stamp out this epidemic overseas to make sure that the American people are safe.

We also have some significant national security issues. We've got to make sure that our efforts against ISIL are properly funded, and so that will—there will be an opportunity for Secretary of Defense Hagel to brief us on the progress in our campaign against ISIL in Iraq and some of the work we're doing in Syria.

So bottom line is that, as I've told my White House staff and I've shared in the past with many of my Cabinet, we are extraordinarily privileged to be in a position where every single day we can have a positive impact in some way on the lives of the American people. And when I started out on this journey with Joe Biden, and we traveled around the country, we were constantly reminded of the hard work, of the sense of community, the sense of family that exists in every pocket and every corner of this country, the same kinds of values that Joe grew up on and I grew up on.

And what we want to do is to make sure that between now and the time that a next administration takes over, that every single day, in every single agency, we are constantly finding ways to build on those values and to make sure that we are making this country safer and more prosperous. And I know that based on the conversations I've had with this Cabinet, there is no lack of enthusiasm or energy in achieving that goal. All right?

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:50 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to White House Ebola Response Coordinator Ronald A. Klain. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization.

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