

remarks, he referred to Robert and Gary Allen, cofounders, Luma Resources in Rochester Hills, MI; Kristin Waters, principal, Bruce

Randolph High School in Denver, CO; and Tom Foy, employee, Center Rock Inc. in Berlin, PA.

Remarks at Orion Energy Systems, Inc., in Manitowoc, Wisconsin January 26, 2011

Thank you very much, everybody. Everybody have a seat, have a seat. It is wonderful to be here. Sort of reminds me of home, all that snow out there. *[Laughter]*

Let me begin by acknowledging some of the special guests who are here. Governor Scott Walker—where is he? There he is. He says he's the mayor of Manitowoc—*[laughter]*—now, I'm looking at the guy—I don't think it's true, but I'm going to introduce him anyway—Justin Nickels is here. I look at a kid like that—*[laughter]*—my life's way—I'm way behind. The mayor of Green Bay, Jim Schmitt, is here. And Gus Frank is here, Chairman—Mr. Chairman, thank you so much.

Now, let me start by clearing something up. I am not here because I lost a bet. *[Laughter]* I just wanted to be clear about that. I have already gotten three Green Bay jerseys. I mean, I've only been on the ground for an hour. *[Laughter]* I've got three jerseys. One of them is from Woodson, and he just said, "See you in the White House."

So let me just get it out of the way: Sunday was a tough day for Bears fans. *[Laughter]* I see one guy with a Bears hat here. He's got a lot of guts. *[Laughter]*

But even if it didn't go the way that I wanted, I am glad to see that one of the greatest rivalries in sports is still there. And we will get you next year. *[Laughter]* I'm just letting you know. Congratulations. In the spirit of sportsmanship, I wish you good luck in the Super Bowl.

Now, last night, I gave this little speech that I have to do once in a while. *[Laughter]* And what I said was, in this new and challenging time, when America is facing tougher competition from countries around the world than ever before, we've got to up our game. We're going to need to go all in. We're going to need to get serious about winning the future.

Now, the words of the man that the Super Bowl trophy is named after has something to say about winning. He said, "There is no room for second place. There is only one place in my game, and that's first place."

That's the kind of determination to win that America needs to show right now. That's what we need to show. We need to win the future.

And that means making sure that all of our kids are getting the best education possible, not only because we need to give every child a chance to fulfill her God-given potential, but because we need to make sure American workers can go to head-to-head with workers in any country on Earth. We've got to be more productive, more capable, more skilled than any workers on Earth.

It means making sure our infrastructure can meet the demands of the 21st century, rebuilding our crumbling roads and bridges, connecting America and the American people with high-speed rail and Internet.

It means doing what we try to do in our own lives: by taking responsibility for our deficits, by cutting wasteful, excessive spending wherever we find it. And it means reforming the way our Government does business so it's efficient and responsive to the needs of Americans instead of being responsive to the needs of lobbyists.

Now, as important as these urgent priorities are, we've also got to make sure that the breakthroughs, the technological breakthroughs that come to define the 21st century, that they take root right here in America. We've got to lead the world in innovation. I spent a lot of time talking about this last night. That's how we'll create the jobs of the future. That's how we're going to build the industries of the future, because we make smarter products using better technology than anybody else. That's how we'll win the future in the 21st century.

So I came here to Manitowoc to glimpse that future. It was right here, almost 50 years ago—I couldn't have made this up. It wasn't until I was on my way here that I found out that a chunk of metal came crashing down to the Earth right here. I promise you, we did not plan this originally. Press won't believe me. It turns out that it was part of a satellite called Sputnik that landed right here, and that set the space race into motion. So I want to say to you today that it is here, more than 50 years later, that the race for the 21st century will be won.

This is a place that's been doing what America has always done throughout its history, you've reinvented yourself. Back in 2003, one of the largest employers around, Mirro, moved their operations abroad. And that must have been a really tough time for this town and this community. Jobs were lost. Families were hurting. Community was shaken up. And I know from Illinois, my home State, when a town loses its major employer it is hard to bounce back. A lot of the young people started moving away, looking for opportunities someplace else.

But you fast-forward to 2011, and new manufacturing plants and new hope are now taking root, part of the reason the unemployment rate here is 4 points lower than it was at the beginning of last year. That's good news.

So you have plants like Tower Tech, one of the largest wind tower manufacturers in North America, a company that's grown by several hundred workers in recent years; plants like Skana Aluminum that's hired more than 70 workers since it took over another part of the old Mirro plant and has plans to reach 100 workers by the end of this year. I'm looking forward to visiting those folks—paying a visit to them later today.

But first I wanted to come to Orion. That's where I wanted to come. That's right. I wanted to come to Orion. Orion is a leader in solar power and energy-efficient technology. Plus the plant is just very cool. *[Laughter]*

So I just took a tour with Neal and got a feel for what you're doing. I saw where the metal is cut, where the paint is applied, where the products are assembled. I met some of the out-

standing workers like so many of you who've made this company the success that it's become.

Now, in 2004, when Orion moved its manufacturing operations here, I'm told that you just had one employee to oversee the development of the manufacturing floor—one employee. Today, you've got more than 250, and I understand you're hoping to have more than 300 by the end of this year. That's good news right here at Orion.

And these aren't just good jobs that can help you pay the bills and support your families. These jobs are good for all of us because they make everybody's energy bills cheaper; they make the planet safer. What you do is sharpening America's competitive edge all around the world.

The jobs you're creating here, the growth you've achieved have come, I know, through hard work and ingenuity and a single-minded focus on being the best at what you do. But I think it's important because this is part of what I talked about last night when I said that all of us as a country, that America, that our Government has to invest in innovation. It's important to remember that this plant, this company has also been supported over the years not just by the Department of Agriculture and the Small Business Administration, but by tax credits and awards we created to give a leg up to renewable energy companies.

So it's one thing to have a good idea, but as Neal and I were talking, a lot of times Wall Street doesn't necessarily want to take a chance on a good idea until they've seen it proven. Sometimes the research that's required, nobody wants to pay for it. And that's where we have to step in.

America needs to get behind entrepreneurs like Neal. We need to get behind clean energy companies like Orion. We need to get behind innovation. That's how we'll meet the goal I set last night and make sure 80 percent of America's electricity comes from clean energy sources by 2035. That is a goal that we can meet. That is a goal we must meet. That's how we'll make America the first country to have 1 million electric vehicles on the road by 2015. In 5

years, a million electric cars on the road. That's how America will lead the world in clean energy. And as I've said before, the nation that leads the world in clean energy will lead the global economy in the 21st century.

This is something—this is not something that I'm making up just to fill up time in a speech. China is making these investments. They have already captured a big chunk of the solar market partly because we fell down on the job. We weren't moving as fast as we should have. Those are jobs that could be created right here that are getting shipped overseas.

But Orion tells a different story. This is the model for the future. I'm told the story of Orion begins a few decades ago. Neal was switching jobs. He decided to try his hand at clean energy. Clean energy seemed pretty farfetched to a lot of people back then, but Neal figured there might be something to it. So he bought a couple of solar panel distributors. Both of them went under. But Neal didn't give up. He kept at it. He started Orion, a company that would not only distribute, but also manufacture its own lights.

And then, about 10 years ago, Neal had an idea. He calls it his epiphany. Probably, since you guys work here you've all heard this story, but I'm going to tell it for everybody else. [Laughter] It was around 2:30 in the morning, but Neal hopped in his car and drove to the factory in Plymouth. It was one of those moments when the future couldn't wait until the morning. And he grabbed whatever tools he could find: a couple 2-by-4s and broom handles. Is this really true, Neal, the broom handles part? [Laughter] Is it? He says it's true. So he started tinkering around until an engineer showed up.

And what Neal had come up with was one of Orion's signature innovations: a new lighting fixture that produced twice the light with half the energy. And it was only then that the real work began, because Neal then had to work to

apply for loans, find investors, find customers who would believe his improbable pitch.

And doing all of that took time and patience, and most of all, it took persistence. It took determination to succeed. And fortunately, that's not something that Neal has a shortage of: determination. As he said himself, the difference between Orion and other companies is—and I'm quoting Neal now—"the difference between playing to win and playing not to lose." And he says, "At Orion, we play to win." We play to win.

So that's what sets Neal apart. That's what sets Orion apart. But that's also what sets America apart. That's what sets America apart. Here in America, we play to win. We don't play not to lose. And part of what I wanted to communicate last night is, having gone through a tough time, having gone through a recession, having seen so many jobs lost, having seen the financial markets take a swoon, you get a sense that a lot of folks have been feeling like, well, we've just got to play not to lose.

We can't take that attitude. If we're on defense, if we're playing not to lose, somebody else is going to lap us, because there are a lot of hungry folks out there, a lot of countries that are gunning for us. So we've got to play to win. We've got to play to win the future.

And if entrepreneurs like Neal keep sticking with it, and small businesses like Orion keep breaking new ground, and if we, as a country, continue to invest in you, the American people, then I'm absolutely confident America will win the future in this century as we did in the last. So keep it up, Orion. Keep it up, Neal. We're proud of you.

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:28 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Harold "Gus" Frank, chairman, Forest County Potawatomi; Charles Woodson, cornerback, National Football League's Green Bay Packers; and Neal R. Verfuerrth, chief executive officer, Orion Energy Systems, Inc.