

WELCOME, TRAVELERS!

-A Speech-

October 17, 2013

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA*
ON THE REOPENING OF THE GOVERNMENT

State Dining Room

11:00 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning, everybody. Please have a seat.

Well, last night, I signed legislation to reopen our government and pay America's bills. Because Democrats and responsible Republicans came together, the first government shutdown in 17 years is now over. The first default in more than 200 years will not happen. These twin threats to our economy have now been lifted. And I want to thank those Democrats and Republicans for getting together and ultimately getting this job done.

Now, there's been a lot of discussion lately of the politics of this shutdown. But let's be clear: There are no winners here. These last few weeks have inflicted completely unnecessary damage on our economy. We don't know yet the full scope of the damage, but every analyst out there believes it slowed our growth.

We know that families have gone without paychecks or services they depend on. We know that potential homebuyers have gotten fewer mortgages, and small business loans have been put on hold. We know that consumers have cut back on spending, and that half of all CEOs say that the shutdown and the threat of shutdown set back their plans to hire over the next six months. We know that just the threat of default -- of America not paying all the bills that we owe on time -- increased our borrowing costs, which adds to our deficit.

And, of course, we know that the American people's frustration with what goes on in this town has never been higher. That's not a surprise that the American people are completely fed up with Washington. At a moment when our economic recovery demands more jobs, more momentum, we've got yet another self-inflicted crisis that set our economy back. And for what?

There was no economic rationale for all of this. Over the past four years, our economy has been growing, our businesses have been creating jobs, and our deficits have been cut in half. We hear some members who pushed for the shutdown say they were doing it to save the American economy -- but nothing has done more to undermine our economy these past three years than the kind of tactics that create these manufactured crises.

And you don't have to take my word for it. The agency that put America's credit rating on watch the other day explicitly cited all of this, saying that our economy "remains more dynamic and resilient" than other advanced economies, and that the only thing putting us at risk is -- and I'm quoting here -- "repeated brinksmanship." That's what the credit rating agency said. That wasn't a political statement; that was an analysis of what's hurting our economy by people whose job it is to analyze these things.

That also happens to be the view of our diplomats who've been hearing from their counterparts internationally. Some of the same folks who pushed for the shutdown and threatened default claim their actions were needed to get America back on the right track, to make sure we're strong. But probably nothing has done more damage to America's credibility in the world, our standing with other countries, than the spectacle that we've seen these past several weeks. It's encouraged our enemies. It's emboldened our competitors. And it's depressed our friends who look to us for steady leadership.

Now, the good news is we'll bounce back from this. We always do. America is the bedrock of the global economy for a reason. We are the indispensable nation that the rest of the world looks to as the safest and most reliable place to invest -- something that's made it easier for generations of Americans to invest in their own futures. We have earned that responsibility over more than two centuries because of the dynamism of our economy and our entrepreneurs, the productivity of our workers, but also because we keep our word and we meet our obligations. That's what full faith and credit means -- you can count on us.

And today, I want our people and our businesses and the rest of the world to know that the full faith and credit of the United States remains unquestioned.

But to all my friends in Congress, understand that how business is done in this town has to change. Because we've all got a lot of work to do on behalf of the American people -- and that includes the hard work of regaining their trust. Our system of self-government doesn't function without it. And now that the government is reopened, and this threat to our economy is removed, all of us need to stop focusing on the lobbyists and the bloggers and the talking heads on radio and the professional activists who profit from conflict, and focus on what the majority of Americans sent us here to do, and that's grow this economy; create good jobs; strengthen the middle class; educate our kids; lay the foundation for broad-based prosperity and get our fiscal house in order for the long haul. That's why we're here. That should be our focus.

Now, that won't be easy. We all know that we have divided government right now. There's a lot of noise out there, and the pressure from the extremes affect how a lot of members of Congress see the day-to-day work that's supposed to be done here. And let's face it, the American people don't see every issue the same way. But that doesn't mean we can't make progress. And when we disagree, we don't have to suggest that the other side doesn't love this country or believe in free enterprise, or all the other rhetoric that seems to get worse every single year. If we disagree on something, we can move on and focus on the things we agree on, and get some stuff done.

Let me be specific about three places where I believe we can make progress right now. First, in the coming days and weeks, we should sit down and pursue a balanced approach to a responsible budget, a budget that grows our economy faster and shrinks our long-term deficits further.

At the beginning of this year, that's what both Democrats and Republicans committed to doing. The Senate passed a budget; House passed a budget; they were supposed to come together and negotiate. And had one side not decided to pursue a strategy of brinkmanship, each side could have gotten together and figured out, how do we shape a budget that provides certainty to businesses and people who rely on government, provides certainty to investors in our economy, and we'd be growing faster right now.

Now, the good news is the legislation I signed yesterday now requires Congress to do exactly that -- what it could have been doing all along.

And we shouldn't approach this process of creating a budget as an ideological exercise -- just cutting for the sake of cutting. The issue is not growth versus fiscal responsibility -- we need both. We need a budget that deals with the issues that most Americans are focused on: creating more good jobs that pay better wages.

And remember, the deficit is getting smaller, not bigger. It's going down faster than it has in the last 50 years. The challenges we have right now are not short-term deficits; it's the long-term obligations that we have around things like Medicare and Social Security. We want to make sure those are there for future generations.

So the key now is a budget that cuts out the things that we don't need, closes corporate tax loopholes that don't help create jobs, and frees up resources for the things that do help us grow -- like education and infrastructure and research. And these things historically have not been partisan. And this shouldn't be as difficult as it's been in past years because we already spend less than we did a few years ago. Our deficits are half of what they were a few years ago. The debt problems we have now are long term, and we can address them without shortchanging our kids, or shortchanging our grandkids, or weakening the security that current generations have earned from their hard work.

So that's number one. Number two, we should finish fixing the job of -- let me say that again. Number two, we should finish the job of fixing our broken immigration system.

There's already a broad coalition across America that's behind this effort of comprehensive immigration reform -- from business leaders to faith leaders to law enforcement. In fact, the Senate has already passed a bill with strong bipartisan support that would make the biggest commitment to border security in our history; would modernize our legal immigration system; make sure everyone plays by the same rules, makes sure that folks who came here illegally have to pay a fine, pay back taxes, meet their responsibilities. That bill has already passed the Senate. And economists estimate that if that bill becomes law, our economy would be 5 percent larger two decades from now. That's \$1.4 trillion in new economic growth.

The majority of Americans think this is the right thing to do. And it's sitting there waiting for the House to pass it. Now, if the House has ideas on how to improve the Senate bill, let's hear them. Let's start the negotiations. But let's not leave this problem to keep festering for another year, or two years, or three years. This can and should get done by the end of this year.

Number three, we should pass a farm bill, one that American farmers and ranchers can depend on; one that protects vulnerable children and adults in times of need; one that gives rural communities opportunities to grow and the long-term certainty that they deserve.

Again, the Senate has already passed a solid bipartisan bill. It's got support from Democrats and Republicans. It's sitting in the House waiting for passage. If House Republicans have ideas that they think would improve the farm bill, let's see them. Let's negotiate. What are we waiting for? Let's get this done.

So, passing a budget; immigration reform; farm bill. Those are three specific things that would make a huge difference in our economy right now. And we could get them done by the end of the year if our focus is on what's good for the American people. And that's just the big stuff. There are all kinds of other things that we could be doing that don't get as much attention.

I understand we will not suddenly agree on everything now that the cloud of crisis has passed. Democrats and Republicans are far apart on a lot of issues. And I recognize there are folks on the other side who think that my policies are misguided -- that's putting it mildly. That's okay. That's democracy. That's how it works. We can debate those

differences vigorously, passionately, in good faith, through the normal democratic process.

And sometimes, we'll be just too far apart to forge an agreement. But that should not hold back our efforts in areas where we do agree. We shouldn't fail to act on areas that we do agree or could agree just because we don't think it's good politics; just because the extremes in our party don't like the word "compromise."

I will look for willing partners wherever I can to get important work done. And there's no good reason why we can't govern responsibly, despite our differences, without lurching from manufactured crisis to manufactured crisis. In fact, one of the things that I hope all of us have learned these past few weeks is that it turns out smart, effective government is important. It matters. I think the American people during this shutdown had a chance to get some idea of all the things, large and small, that government does that make a difference in people's lives.

We hear all the time about how government is the problem. Well, it turns out we rely on it in a whole lot of ways. Not only does it keep us strong through our military and our law enforcement, it plays a vital role in caring for our seniors and our veterans, educating our kids, making sure our workers are trained for the jobs that are being created, arming our businesses with the best science and technology so they can compete with companies from other countries. It plays a key role in keeping our food and our toys and our workplaces safe. It helps folks rebuild after a storm. It conserves our natural resources. It finances startups. It helps to sell our products overseas. It provides security to our diplomats abroad.

So let's work together to make government work better, instead of treating it like an enemy or purposely making it work worse. That's not what the founders of this nation envisioned when they gave us the gift of self-government. You don't like a particular policy or a particular president, then argue for your position. Go out there and win an election. Push to change it. But don't break it. Don't break what our predecessors spent over two centuries building. That's not being faithful to what this country is about.

And that brings me to one last point. I've got a simple message for all the dedicated and patriotic federal workers who've either worked without pay or been forced

off the job without pay these past few weeks, including most of my own staff: Thank you. Thanks for your service. Welcome back. What you do is important. It matters.

You defend our country overseas. You deliver benefits to our troops who've earned them when they come home. You guard our borders. You protect our civil rights. You help businesses grow and gain footholds in overseas markets. You protect the air we breathe and the water our children drink. And you push the boundaries of science and space, and you guide hundreds of thousands of people each day through the glories of this country. Thank you. What you do is important. And don't let anybody else tell you different. Especially the young people who come to this city to serve -- believe that it matters. Well, you know what, you're right. It does.

And those of us who have the privilege to serve this country have an obligation to do our job as best we can. We come from different parties, but we are Americans first. And that's why disagreement cannot mean dysfunction. It can't degenerate into hatred. The American people's hopes and dreams are what matters, not ours. Our obligations are to them. Our regard for them compels us all, Democrats and Republicans, to cooperate, and compromise, and act in the best interests of our nation -- one nation, under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all.

Thanks very much.

END

11:20 A.M. EDT



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