

Administration of Barack Obama, 2010

Remarks at the Ford Motor Company Chicago Assembly Plant in Chicago, Illinois

August 5, 2010

The President. Hello, Chicago! Hello, hello, hello! What's going on? Thank you, everybody. And listen, it is good to see everybody. I appreciate everybody way back there. Hello, hello!

We—it is wonderful to be here. There are a couple of special guests I want to mention here before we get started. First of all, we got the Governor of the great State of Illinois, Pat Quinn. Give it up for Pat. Got one of the finest mayors in the country, Mayor Richard Daley is in the house. Our treasurer and soon-to-be United States Senator, Alexi Giannoulias, is here. A number of outstanding Members of Congress who've been very supportive of the auto industry: Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr.; Congressman Bobby Rush; Congressman Danny Davis; Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky; Congressman Mike Quigley.

We've got Fred Hochberg of the—who's the Chairman and President of the Export-Import Bank, which is going to help Ford sell all these outstanding cars overseas, not just here in the United States. And your own president, Mark Fields, is in the house. Give it up.

So it is good to be back in Chicago. It's good to see some friendly faces, be back in the old neighborhoods.

Audience members. Happy birthday!

The President. Thank you. I've gotten a little more gray hair since I was last down here. *[Laughter]* But it is wonderful to be back home.

Now, don't get me wrong, the White House is nice. And I've got a really short commute from my office to the house. I don't have to drive too far. And there's no greater honor than being your President. But let me tell you something: There's nothing like coming home, especially when your home is Chicago.

And I just had a chance to tour this extraordinary plant to see the great work that you're doing here. I notice that Mark and everybody, they put all the White Sox fans in front for me to meet. I didn't see a lot of Cubs guys on the line or Cardinals fans.

But this plant has a remarkable history. Henry Ford built it. Henry Ford built this plant in 1924 to manufacture the Model T. When the Great Depression struck and 25 Ford plants closed down, this one stayed open. When World War II was raging, this plant was churning out armored vehicles that helped make victory possible. In the 1990s, workers at this plant built the best-selling car in America 5 years in a row.

So this plant is part of American history. For nearly nine decades, this plant has been the backbone of this community. There are workers here whose fathers worked on this line—I just met one while I was on my way over here—whose fathers' fathers worked on this line. This plant, like the entire industry, has been a source of deep pride for generations of American workers whose imaginations and hard work led to some of the finest cars that the world has ever known and whose sweat helped build up the middle class that lifted up the dreams of millions of people all across America.

This plant has stood through the good times, when American auto industry ruled the world, and in the not-so-good times, when the future of the auto industry was very much in doubt.

And let's face it: We've seen some of those not-so-good times in recent years. The year before I took office, this industry lost hundreds of thousands of jobs. Sales plunged 40 percent—40 percent. When the financial crisis hit and this great recession hit, that collided with an industry that for a long time had put off some hard choices, had put off adapting to changing times. And we had to face a hard, unimaginable reality, which was two of the Big Three automakers, GM and Chrysler, were on the brink of liquidation. If that had happened, more than 1 million jobs could have been lost, and that would have been a devastating blow to the entire economy.

Now, Ford was in better financial shape and was able to weather the storm without Federal assistance. That's a testament to the hard work you all do and the choices this company made. But I don't have to tell you—and your CEO will—has said this publicly—if your competitors had gone down, they would have taken down a whole bunch of the suppliers you depend on. The brand of American autos would have diminished. That would have had severe consequences for Ford. And that's the challenge we faced when I took office: an industry that was on the brink.

Now, there were a lot of folks who were ready to write off the American auto industry, who thought we should just have walked away from you. Some still think that today. But you know what, that's not how you build a better future. That's not how you build a better America. We don't give up. The United States does not quit. We always compete. That's what we do. And that's what we're doing with the U.S. auto industry.

So I refused to walk away from this industry and American jobs. I put my faith in the American worker. I believe the American worker is the best worker in the world. And if we were willing to work hard together and rebuild and sacrifice in the short term, it would be a new beginning for a great American industry. If we could just get a sense of common purpose, we could once again see the best cars in the world designed, engineered, forged right here in Chicago, right here in the Midwest, right here in the United States of America.

So I tell you what. Last Friday, I stood with workers at a GM plant. I stood with workers at a Chrysler plant. Today I'm standing with workers at a Ford plant. I put my money on the American worker. I'd place my bets on the American worker any day of the week. And because of your efforts and the sacrifice that have been made across this industry over the past year, this industry is growing stronger. It's creating new jobs. It's manufacturing the fuel-efficient cars and trucks that will carry America towards an energy-independent future. Each and every one of you is proving the naysayers wrong.

All three automakers—all three U.S. automakers are now operating at a profit. That's the first time it's happened in 6 years. America's automakers have added 55,000 jobs since last June. That's the best job growth in more than 10 years in this industry. Sales have rebounded. Automakers are keeping plants open through the usual summer shutdown to keep up with demand. Across the supply chain, plants that would not exist without the sacrifices made across industry are running at max or near-full capacity.

And this plant, right here, is shifting into higher gear. What I said last year was if American automakers were willing to make the tough choices necessary to make them more competitive in the future, America would stand by them. And one thing we did was put in

place a new national fuel efficiency standard for all new cars and trucks sold in America. This was good for consumers, it was good for the environment, and it finally gave our automakers the certainty they needed to plan for the future, a future where American workers build 21st-century cars that the world wants to buy.

So Ford dedicated itself to increasing fuel efficiency of more than a dozen of its models. And the Department of Energy awarded Ford a 2-year loan commitment to help make that happen. And Ford used that loan to retool this factory to build the next-generation Explorer. That's a model that will be up to 30 percent more fuel efficient.

Now, I should add, by the way, my most recent car was a Ford. I had one of those Ford Escapes, and that was a spiffy car. [Laughter] Now, I have to admit that I bought it about 2 months before I got Secret Service—[laughter]—and they wouldn't let me drive anymore. [Laughter] So it only had like 2,000 miles after 5 years, but I really enjoyed those 2,000 miles. [Laughter]

But I just got in that Explorer and that's an outstanding car. And over the next 2 months, this plant will bring on a second shift of 1,200 workers to build that Explorer, nearly doubling your workforce. That's not just good for this plant, that's good for the stamping plant in Chicago Heights; it's good for the suppliers, who are investing in new facilities and adding shifts and hiring more than 600 workers in Illinois and Indiana and Michigan; it's good for the entire community; it's good for the city; it's good for the State.

And Ford's also committed to selling more of the cars you build around the world, including the Explorer that you manufacture right here. We're going to sell it in up to 90 countries.

So today, to support those efforts, my administration is announcing a new \$250 million Export-Import Bank loan guarantee for Ford. And what this does is this helps Ford export—this will help Ford export more than 200,000 cars and trucks overseas, and that means more production and more manufacturing jobs right here in the United States of America.

And it's going to help us reach the goal that I set in my State of the Union Address, which is, we are going to double America's exports of goods and services over the next 5 years. We're tired of just buying from everybody else; we want to start selling to other people, because we know we can compete.

That's how we're going to grow our economy. That's how we're going to support millions of good jobs for American workers to do what they've always done: build great products and sell them around the world. Our workers can compete with anybody, and America is going to compete aggressively for every job out there and every industry out there and every market out there.

So, Chicago, here's the bottom line: We've still got a long way to go. We've gone through a very, very difficult time. The auto industry has gone through a difficult time. And it's not back to where it needs to be. Our economy is not yet where it needs to be. It's going to take more time to heal from all the damage that was done. But we're beginning to see our efforts pay off. We are headed in the right direction. We are moving forward. The industry isn't just on the way back; it's on the way to being number one again. And I am convinced we're going to rebuild not only the auto industry but the economy better and stronger than before. And at its heart is going to be three powerful words: "Made in America"—made in America.

And to all those naysayers in Washington, what we call the "just say no" crowd—[laughter]—who said that investing in you would guarantee failure, who said we should just walk away from this industry, who said that standing by America's automakers was, quote, "the worst investment you could make," who tried to block us at every turn, I wish they were standing here today and saw what I see. I wish they could see the pride you take in building these great cars, American-made cars.

And my message to them is, don't bet against the American worker; don't lose faith in the American people; don't lose faith in American industry. We are coming back.

Just a few weeks before I visited that Chrysler plant—this is a true story—I went to a Chrysler plant. A few weeks before, 14 employees had won the lottery. And when they won, everybody thought they were just going to cash in and kick back and retire. Nobody would have blamed them for that. This is tough work.

But here's the thing: Most of them aren't retiring. And the worker who bought the winning ticket, what he did was he went out and bought for his wife one of the new cars that was being made in that plant, and then he went out and he bought American flags for his hometown, because he's proud of his country. And he keeps on showing up to work every single day, because he's proud of his job.

And that's the character of America: proud of your job; proud of your community; proud of your country; proud of the company you work for. That's what Ford is about. That's what you are about. That's what Chicago's about. That's what Illinois's about. That's what the United States of America's about. We are coming back.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you, and God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:25 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Mark Fields, executive vice president and president of the Americas, and Alan Mulally, president and chief executive officer, Ford Motor Company; and William Shanteau, Chrysler Jefferson North Assembly Plant worker, who purchased the winning June Powerball jackpot ticket in Curtice, OH, and his wife Lisa. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

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