

Remarks at Prince George's Community College in Largo, Maryland March 15, 2012

The President. Thank you. Well, I am so—what a wonderful reception. That is so nice. Thank you. You're all just cheering because I know Michelle. [*Laughter*] Well, the—it is wonderful to be here. Folks who have a seat, feel free to take a seat.

I want to thank Roy for that introduction. He talks pretty smooth, right? That whole—[*laughter*]. It's great to be back in Maryland. It's great to be here at Prince George's Community College.

Audience member. We love you!

The President. I love you back. Now, but before I start, I want to thank your other president, Dr. Charlene Dukes. Your Governor, Martin O'Malley, is in the house. Lieutenant Governor Brown is here. We've got one of the finest Members of the United States Senate that you could hope to have in Ben Cardin. Congresswoman Donna Edwards is here. And County Executive Rushern Baker is here. And I want to thank all of you for coming out here today.

Now, I just finished learning about some of the work that you're doing here at this community college to make sure that homes are using less energy and helping folks save money on their heating and their air-conditioning bills. And I was very impressed. I'm even more impressed because I know this program is giving a lot of people a chance to make a decent living, everyone from veterans to folks with disabilities to folks who've just been down on their luck, but want to work. So I want you to know how proud I am of this program, of this institution, of all of you.

The skills that you gain here at this community college will be the surest path to success in this economy. Because if there's one thing that we're thinking about a lot these days, is, first of all, how do we make sure that American workers have the skills and education they need to be able to succeed in this competitive global economy? And community colleges all across the country and all across Maryland are doing an outstanding job providing young people that

first opportunity after high school, but also helping older workers retrain for the jobs of the future, because the economy is constantly adapting.

So community colleges are big. Community colleges are critical to our long-term success. What's also critical to our long-term success is the question of energy: How do we use less energy? How do we produce more energy right here in the United States of America?

And I know this is an especially important topic for everybody right now because you guys have to fill up at the gas station. And it's rough. Gas prices and the world oil markets right now are putting a lot of pressure on families right now. And one of the things that it is important to remember is for a lot of folks, just doing what you have to do to get your kids to school, to get to the job, to do grocery shopping, you don't have an option. You've got to be able to fill up that gas tank. And when prices spike on the world market, it's like a tax; it's like somebody is going into your pocket.

We passed the payroll tax at the beginning of this year to make sure that everybody had an extra \$40 in their paycheck, on average, in part because we anticipated that gas prices might be going up like they did last year, given tight world oil supplies.

But that doesn't make it easier for a lot of families out there that are just struggling to get by. This is tough. Now the question is, how do we meet this challenge? Because right now we're starting to see a lot of politicians—talking a lot, but not doing much. And we've seen this movie before. Gas prices went up around this time last year. Gas prices shot up in the spring and summer of 2008; I remember, I was running for President at the time. This has been going on for years now.

And every time prices start to go up, especially in an election year, politicians dust off their three-point plans for \$2 gas. [*Laughter*] I guess this year they decided, we're going to make it \$2.50. [*Laughter*] I don't know where—you know, why not \$2.40? Why not

\$2.10? [Laughter] But they tell the same story. They head down to the gas station; they make sure a few cameras are following them, and then they start acting like we've got a magic wand and we will give you cheap gas forever if you just elect us. [Laughter] Every time—been the same script for 30 years. It's like a bad rerun. [Laughter]

Now, here's the thing: Because we've seen it all before, we know better; you know better. There is no such thing as a quick fix when it comes to high gas prices. There's no silver bullet. Anybody who tells you otherwise isn't really looking for a solution; they're trying to ride the political wave of the moment.

Usually, the most common thing, when you actually ask them, all right, how is it that you're going to get back to 2-dollar-a-gallon gas, how are you going to do it, specifically, what is your plan—then typically what you'll hear from them is, well, if we just drilled more for oil, then gas prices would immediately come down and all our problems would go away. That's usually the response.

Now, Maryland, there are two problems with that answer. First of all, we are drilling. Under my administration, America is producing more oil today than at any time in the last 8 years—any time. That's a fact. [Applause] That's a fact. We've quadrupled the number of operating oil rigs to a record high. I want everybody to listen to that: We have more oil rigs operating now than ever. That's a fact. We've approved dozens of new pipelines to move oil across the country. We announced our support for a new one in Oklahoma that will help get more oil down to refineries on the Gulf Coast.

Over the last 3 years, my administration has opened millions of acres of land in 23 different States for oil and gas exploration. Offshore, I've directed my administration to open up more than 75 percent of our potential oil resources. That includes an area in the Gulf of Mexico we opened up a few months ago that could produce more than 400 million barrels of oil.

So do not tell me that we're not drilling. We're drilling all over this country. I mean, I guess there are a few spots where we're not

drilling. We're not drilling in the National Mall. [Laughter] We're not drilling at your house. [Laughter] Right? I mean, I guess we could try to have, like, 200 oil rigs in the middle of the Chesapeake Bay.

Audience members. No!

The President. Well, that's the question. We are drilling at a record pace, but we're doing so in a way that protects the health and safety and the natural resources of the American people.

All right, so that's point number one. If you start hearing this “drill, baby, drill; drill, drill, drill”—if you start hearing that again, just remember you've got the facts. We're doing that. Tell me something new. That's problem number one.

Here's the second problem with what some of these politicians are talking about. There's a problem with a strategy that only relies on drilling, and that is, America uses more than 20 percent of the world's oil. If we drilled every square inch of this country—so we went to your house, and we went to the National Mall, and we put up those rigs everywhere—we'd still have only 2 percent of the world's known oil reserves. Let's say we miss something; maybe it's 3 percent instead of 2. We're using 20; we have 2.

Now, you don't need to be getting an excellent education at Prince George's Community College to know that we've got a math problem here. Right? [Laughter] I help out Sasha occasionally with her math homework, and I know that if you've got 2 and you've got 20, there's a gap. [Laughter] There's a gap, right? Do we have anybody who's good at math here? Am I right? Okay.

So, if we don't develop other sources of energy, if we don't develop the technology to use less energy to make our economy more energy efficient, then we will always be dependent on foreign countries for our energy needs.

And that means every time there's instability in the Middle East, which is the main thing that's driving oil prices up right now—it's the same thing that was driving oil prices up last year—every time that happens, every time that there's unrest, any time that there's concern about a conflict, suddenly, oil futures shoot up,

you're going to feel it at the pump. It will happen every single time.

We will not fully be in control of our energy future if our strategy is only to drill for the 2 percent, but we still have to buy the 20 percent. And there's another wrinkle to this. Other countries use oil too. We're not the only ones. So you've got rapidly growing nations like China and India, and they're all starting to buy cars. They're getting wealthier. They want cars too. And that means the price of gas will rise.

Just to give you an example: In 2010, China alone added 10 million new cars. That's just in 1 year. And there are about a billion Chinese. So they've got a lot more people who are going to want cars in the future, which means they are going to want to get some of that oil, and that will drive prices up. So we can't just drill our way out of the problem. We are drilling, but it's not going to solve our problem.

That's not the future I want for the United States of America. We can't allow ourselves to be held hostage to events on the other side of the globe. That's not who we are. America controls its own destiny. We're not dependent on somebody else.

So we can't have an energy strategy for the last century that traps us in the past. We need an energy strategy for the future, an all-of-the-above strategy for the 21st century that develops every source of American-made energy. Yes, develop as much oil and gas as we can, but also develop wind power and solar power and biofuels. Make our buildings more fuel efficient. Make our homes more fuel efficient. Make our cars and trucks more fuel efficient so they get more miles for the gallon. That's where I want to take this country.

And here's—the best part of it is thousands of Americans have jobs right now because we've doubled the use of clean energy in this country since I came into office. And I want to keep on making those investments. I don't want to see wind turbines and solar panels and high-tech batteries made in other countries by other workers. I want to make them here. I want to make them here in Maryland. I want to make them here in the United States of America, with American workers. That's what I want.

So, when I came into office, we said, all right, how are we going to start moving America in that direction? It's not a thing you get done in 1 year, but how do we start moving in that direction? So, after 30 years of not doing anything, we raised fuel economy standards on cars and trucks so that by the middle of the next decade, our cars will average nearly 55 miles per gallon. That's double what we get today, 55 miles per gallon—55 miles a gallon.

So the young people here who were driving those beaters that—[laughter]—getting 5 miles per gallon—[laughter]. We're going to get you to 55. And that will save the average family more than \$8,000 over the life of a car—\$8,000. That will help pay some bills. That means you'll be able to fill up every 2 weeks instead of every week. And those are the cars we need to keep building here in the United States.

Audience member. Yes, we can!

The President. Yes, we can do that.

All right, so now, to fuel these cars and trucks, obviously, if they're using less gas, that's great. That saves us; we're using less oil. But we also want to invest in clean advanced biofuels that can replace some of the oil that we're currently using. That's important.

Already, we're using these biofuels to power everything from city buses to UPS trucks to Navy ships. I want to see more of these fuels in American cars—homegrown fuels—because that means we're buying less oil from foreign countries and we're creating jobs here in the United States, including big parts of rural America, big parts of rural Maryland, where the economy oftentimes is struggling, you have a real opportunity to create entire new industries and put people to work. And it's happening all across the country.

So all of these steps have put us on a path of greater energy independence. Here's a statistic I want everybody to remember next time you're talking to somebody who doesn't know what they're talking about. [Laughter] Since I took office, America's dependence on foreign oil has gone down every single year. All right? In 2010, our oil dependence, the amount that we're bringing in, the percentage we're

bringing in, was under 50 percent for the first time in 13 years. We've got to do better than that, and we can do better than that.

Audience member. Yes, we can!

The President. Yes, we can. But in order to do better than that, we've got to tell the folks who are stuck in the past that our future depends on this all-of-the-above energy strategy. That's our job. That it can't just be—it can't just be—drilling for more oil. We're drilling for more oil, but that can't be all the solution; that's just part of the solution.

Now, the—here's the sad thing. Lately, we've heard a lot of professional politicians, a lot of the folks who are running for a certain office—[laughter]—who shall go unnamed—they've been talking down new sources of energy. They dismiss wind power. They dismiss solar power. They make jokes about biofuels. They were against raising fuel standards. I guess they like gas guzzlers. They think that's good for our future. We're trying to move towards the future; they want to be stuck in the past.

And we've heard this kind of thinking before. Let me tell you something. If some of these folks were around when Columbus set sail—[laughter]—they must have been founding members of the Flat Earth Society. [Laughter] They would not have believed that the world was round. We've heard these folks in the past. They probably would have agreed with one of the pioneers of the radio who said: "Television won't last. It's a flash in the pan." [Laughter] One of Henry Ford's advisers was quoted as saying, "The horse is here to stay, but the automobile is only a fad." [Laughter]

There have always been folks like that. There always have been folks who are the naysayers and don't believe in the future and don't believe in trying to do things differently. One of my predecessors, Rutherford B. Hayes, reportedly said about the telephone, "It's a great invention, but who would ever want to use one?" [Laughter] That's why he's not on Mount Rushmore—[laughter]—because he's looking backwards. He's not looking forwards. He's explaining why we can't do something, instead of why we can do something.

The point is, there will always be cynics and naysayers who just want to keep on doing things the same way that we've always done them. They want to double down on the same ideas that got us into some of the mess that we've been in. But that's not who we are as Americans. See, America has always succeeded because we refuse to stand still. We put faith in the future. We are inventors. We are builders. We are makers of things. We are Thomas Edison. We are the Wright Brothers. We are Bill Gates. We are Steve Jobs. That's who we are.

That's who we need to be right now. [Applause] That's who we need to be right now. I don't understand when I hear folks who are in elected office or aspiring to elected office, who ignore the facts and seem to just want to get a cute bumper-sticker line, instead of actually trying to solve our problems.

What I just said about energy, by the way, is not disputed by any energy expert. Everybody agrees with this. So why is it that somebody who wants to help lead the country would be ignoring the facts?

If you want an example of what I'm talking about, consider an important issue that's before Congress right now.

I think somebody may have fainted. All right. Remember next time, if you're going to stand for a long time, you got to eat. [Laughter] I'm—no, no, it's true. You got to get something to eat. You got to get some juice. I'm just saying. It's true. They'll be okay; just make sure to give them space.

The question—there's a question before Congress I want everybody to know about. The question is whether or not we should keep giving \$4 billion in taxpayer subsidies to the oil industry.

The oil industry has been subsidized by you, the taxpayer, for about a hundred years—100 years. One hundred years, a century. So some of the same folks who are complaining about biofuels getting subsidies or wind or solar energy getting subsidies or electric cars and advanced batteries getting subsidies to help get them off the ground, these same folks, when you say, why are we still giving subsidies to the oil industry, "Well, no, we need those."

Oil companies are making more money right now than they've ever made. On top of the money they're getting from you at the gas station every time you fill up, they want some of your tax dollars as well.

That doesn't make any sense. Does it make sense?

Audience members. No!

The President. It's inexcusable. It is time for this oil industry giveaway to end. So, in the next few weeks, I expect Congress to vote on ending these subsidies. And when they do, they'll put every single Member of Congress on record. I guess you can stand up for the oil companies who really don't need much help, or they can stand up for the American people, because we can take that \$4 billion, we could be investing it in clean energy in a good energy future, in fuel efficiency. We could actually be trying to solve a vital problem.

They can bet—they can place their bets on the energy of the past, or they can place their bets on America's future: on American workers, American ingenuity, American technology, American science, American-made energy, American efficiency, American productivity. We can bet on America and our own capacity to solve this problem. That's the choice we face. That's what's at stake right now.

Maryland, we know what direction we have to go in. And every American out there, as frustrated as they are about gas prices right now, when you actually ask people, they'll tell you, yes, we've got to find new sources of energy. We got to find new ways of doing things. People understand that. We just got to get Washington to understand it. We got to get politicians to understand it.

We've got to invest in a serious, sustained, all-of-the-above energy strategy that develops every resource available for the 21st century. We've got to choose between the past and the future. And that's a choice we shouldn't be

afraid to make because we've always bet on the future, and we're good at it. America is good at the future. We are good at being ahead of the curve. We're good at being on the cutting edge.

Ending these subsidies won't bring down gas prices tomorrow. Even if we drilled every inch of America, that won't bring gas prices down tomorrow. But if we're tired of watching gas prices spike every single year, and being caught in this position, where what happens in the Middle East ends up taking money out of your pocket, if we want to stabilize energy prices for the long term and the medium term, if we want America to grow, we're going to have look past what we've been doing and put ourselves on the path to a real, sustainable energy future.

That's the future you deserve. So I need all of you to make your voices heard. Get on the phone, write an e-mail, send a letter, let your Member of Congress know where you stand. Tell them to do the right thing. Tell them we can win this fight. Tell them we're going to combine our creativity and our optimism, our brainpower, our manpower, our womanpower. Tell them: Yes, we can. Tell them we are going to build an economy that lasts. Tell them we're going to make this the American century just like the last century.

Thank you, Prince George's County. Thank you, Prince George's Community College. Thank you, Maryland. Let's get to work. God bless you. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:05 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to W. Roy Dunbar, chairman, Sustainable Star Renewable Energy & Construction; Rushern L. Baker III, county executive, Prince George's County, MD; and William H. Gates III, chairman, Microsoft Corp.