

Remarks at Shaker Heights High School in Shaker Heights, Ohio January 4, 2012

The President. Hello, Ohio! Ah, it is good to be back in Ohio. It is good to be back in Shaker Heights, home of the Red Raiders.

Audience member. Mr. President, I love you!

The President. I love you back. And I'm glad to be back. I'm glad to be here.

I want to thank your mayor, Earl Leiken, for hosting us today; your superintendent, Mark Freeman; the principal here, Mike Griffith. Well, and I know—I'm pretty sure we've got a couple of Congresspeople here, but I don't see them. Where are they? The—okay, we got Marcia Fudge. Marcy Kaptur is here. Dennis Kucinich, Betty Sutton in the house. Outstanding Members of Congress, doing the right thing every day, so we thank them all for being here.

Now, I understand the folks here at this school have a pretty good basketball team—boys and girls. Unfortunately, I have no eligibility left. [*Laughter*] So I can't play with you.

I want to wish everybody a happy New Year; 2012 is going to be a good year. It's going to be a good year. And one of my New Year's resolutions is to make sure that I get out of Washington and spend time with folks like you. Because folks here in Ohio and all across the country, I want you to know you're the reason why I ran for this office in the first place. You remind me what we are still fighting for. You inspire me.

Audience member. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Okay. You do? [*Laughter*]

No, you remind me that this country is all about folks who work hard and where responsibility pays off, an America where anybody who puts in the effort and plays by the rules can get ahead.

That's the America you deserve. That's the America we're working to build. That's why I told Congress before the new year they couldn't leave for vacation until we made sure 160 million working Americans wouldn't get hit with a tax hike on January 1.

Now, this wasn't easy. It should have been easy, but it wasn't. But in the end, we got members of both parties to come together and make sure that you could keep more money in your paychecks each month. And you're keeping that extra \$40 in every paycheck because we made sure that we didn't stunt the recovery. We made sure that families got the break that they need. And that means more security for your families. It also means a boost for our economy at a time when we've got to do everything we can to keep it growing. Because more money spent by more Americans means more businesses hiring more workers.

And so when I—when Congress returns, I'm going to urge them to extend this tax cut all the way through 2012, with no drama, no delay. Do the right thing. It is a no-brainer. Let's get it done. Let's pass these tax cuts.

Now, we still have more to do. So today we're taking another important step, one that will bring us closer to the economy that we need, an economy where everybody plays by the same rules.

And to help us do that, I'm joined by somebody you might recognize, Richard Cordray. Son of Ohio; a good, good man. Today I'm appointing Richard as America's consumer watchdog. And that means he is going to be in charge of one thing: looking out for the best interests of American consumers, looking out for you.

His job will be to protect families like yours from the abuses of the financial industry. His job will be to make sure that you've got all the information you need to make important financial decisions. Right away, he'll start working to make sure millions of Americans are treated fairly by mortgage brokers and payday lenders and debt collectors. In fact, just this week, his agency is opening up a simple 1-800 number that you can call to make sure you're getting a fair deal on your mortgage and hold banks and brokers accountable if you're not.

Now, I nominated Richard for this job last summer, so you may be wondering why am I

appointing him today. It would be a good question. [Laughter] For almost half a year, Republicans in the Senate have blocked Richard's confirmation.

They refused to even give Richard an up-or-down vote. Now, this is not because Richard is not qualified. There's no question that Richard is the right person for the job. He's got the support of Democrats and Republicans around the country. A majority of attorney generals—Richard's a former attorney general—a majority of attorney generals from both parties across the country have called for Richard to be confirmed. Your local Members of Congress who are here today, they support him. He has the support of a majority in the Senate. Everyone agrees Richard is more than qualified.

So what's the problem, you might ask. The only reason Republicans in the Senate have blocked Richard is because they don't agree with the law that set up a consumer watchdog in the first place. They want to weaken the law. They want to water it down. And by the way, a lot of folks in the financial industry have poured millions of dollars to try to water it down.

That makes no sense. Does anybody think that the reason that we got in such a financial mess—the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, the worst economic crisis in a generation—that the reason was because of too much oversight of the financial industry?

Audience members. No!

The President. Of course not. We shouldn't be weakening oversight. We shouldn't be weakening accountability. We should be strengthening it, especially when it comes to looking out for families like yours.

The financial firms have armies of lobbyists in Washington looking out for their interests. You need somebody looking out for your interests and fighting for you, and that's Richard Cordray.

Now, I have to say, Richard's a really nice guy. [Laughter] You know, you look at him and you think, this guy is not somebody who's going around picking fights. And yet this fight on behalf of consumers is something that Richard

has been waging here in Ohio for the better part of two decades, so—[applause].

As your attorney general, he helped recover billions of dollars in things like pension funds on behalf of retirees. He protected consumers from dishonest lending practices. Before that, Richard was the State treasurer, where he earned a reputation for working with folks from across the spectrum—Democrats, Republicans, bankers, consumer advocates—had a great reputation across the board, doing the right thing.

And, Cleveland, you've seen the difference that Richard can make for consumers, and I have too. And that's why I want Richard to keep standing up for you, not just here in Ohio, but for consumers all across the country.

Now, every day that Richard waited to be confirmed—and we were pretty patient. I mean, we kept on saying to Mitch McConnell and the other folks, let's go ahead and confirm him. Why isn't he being called up? Let's go. Every day that we waited was another day when millions of Americans were left unprotected. Because without a director in place, the consumer watchdog agency that we've set up doesn't have all the tools it needs to protect consumers against dishonest mortgage brokers or payday lenders and debt collectors who are taking advantage of consumers. And that's inexcusable. It's wrong. And I refuse to take no for an answer.

So I've said before that I want to look for every possible opportunity to work with Congress to move this country forward and create jobs. I'm going to look for every opportunity to try to bridge the partisan divide and get things done, because that's what the American people need right now. And that means putting construction workers back on the jobs repairing our roads and our bridges. That means keeping our teachers in the classrooms. That means keeping our cops and firefighters doing what they do, protecting us every day. That means helping small businesses get ahead. That means serving our veterans as well as they've served us, like this young man right in the front. We are grateful for him, for his service.

These are ideas that have support from Democrats; they have support from Republicans around the country, Independents around the country. I want to work with Congress to get them done.

But when Congress refuses to act, and as a result, hurts our economy and puts our people at risk, then I have an obligation as President to do what I can without them. I've got an obligation to act on behalf of the American people. And I'm not going to stand by while a minority in the Senate puts party ideology ahead of the people that we were elected to serve. Not with so much at stake, not at this make-or-break moment for middle class Americans. We're not going to let that happen.

For way too long, we've had a financial system that was stacked against ordinary Americans. Banks on Wall Street played by different rules than businesses on Main Street. They played by different rules than a lot of community banks who were doing the right thing across the country: hidden fees, fine print that led consumers to make financial decisions that they didn't always understand.

Richard and I, before we came here, had an opportunity to visit with a wonderful elderly couple, the Easons. And Mr. Eason is a former marine, served in the Korean war. Mrs. Eason makes a really good sweet potato pie. She gave me one. I'm going to eat it later, after. *[Laughter]* I didn't want to eat it before because I didn't want to get sleepy having a big piece of pie right before. *[Laughter]*

But their story was the story of a lot of folks in this region, where a mortgage broker came to them, said that they could do some home repair for a few thousand dollars, and they ended up getting scammed. The loans got flipped. They ended up owing \$80,000, almost losing their home, and the repairs were never made.

Those kinds of practices, that's not who we are. We cannot allow people to be taken advantage of. And it's not just because it's bad for those individuals. All that risky behavior led—helped to contribute to the economic crisis that we're all still digging ourselves out of. All those subprime loans, all those foreclosures, all the problems in the housing market, that's all

contributing to an economy that's not moving as fast as we want it.

And that's why, last year, we put in place new rules, new rules of the road to make sure that a few bad apples in the financial sector can't break the law, they can't cheat consumers, they can't put our entire economy in danger. And many of these provisions are already starting to make a difference. For the first time in history, we put in place a consumer watchdog, someone whose only job is to look out for the interests of everyday Americans.

And we are so fortunate to have somebody like Richard who's willing to do it, despite great sacrifice to his family. He's the right man for the job.

So if you're a student—I see some young people out here—his job will be to protect you from dishonest lending practices and to make sure that you've got the information you need on student loans. He's already started up an initiative called Know Before You Owe. *[Laughter]* That's a good slogan: Know Before You Owe. You don't want to owe and then know. *[Laughter]*

If you're a veteran, he'll help make sure that you aren't taken advantage of when you're coming home from serving your country. And it turns out that military families are some of the folks who are most vulnerable to some of these financial abuses.

If you're a senior, Richard's going to help make sure you don't lose your home or your retirement because somebody saw you as an easier target. And that's what happened to the Easons. Endia, who I think is here—Mrs. Eason, are you here? You're somewhere here. There's—Mrs. Eason's down there. Ninety-one years old. And as I mentioned, Mrs. Eason's husband William is a former marine, also a former boxer. So don't mess with him. *[Laughter]*

And I just want to repeat, 10 years ago they were approached by a broker who offered them a loan to make needed repairs on their home, made everything sound easy. Easons agreed. Broker ended up disappearing. They get left with \$80,000 in debt, almost lose their home. They didn't lose it because of the

intervention of some terrific non-for-profits that Richard, when he was treasurer here in Ohio, helped to support. Now—[*applause*].

Audience member. [*Inaudible*].

The President. East Side, that's right.

Now, the Easons are good people. They're what America is all about. They worked hard. They served their country. They saved their money. They didn't live high on the hog. It's a modest house. They earned the right to retire with dignity and with respect, and they shouldn't have to worry about being tricked by somebody who's out to make a quick buck. And they need somebody who is going to stand up for them, and millions of Americans need somebody who is going to look out for their interests. And that person is Richard Cordray.

And we know what would happen if Republicans in Congress were allowed to keep holding Richard's nomination hostage. More of our loved ones would be tricked into making bad financial decisions. More dishonest lenders could take advantage of some of the most vulnerable families. And the vast majority of financial firms who do the right thing would be undercut by those who don't.

See, most people in the financial services industry do the right thing, but they're at a disadvantage if nobody is enforcing the rules. We can't let that happen. Now is not the time to

play politics while people's livelihoods are at stake. Now's the time to do everything we can to protect consumers, prevent financial crises like the one that we've been through from ever happening again. That starts with letting Richard do his job.

So I know—let me just close by saying this. I know that you're hearing a lot of promises from a lot of politicians lately. Today you're only going to hear one from me. As long as I have the privilege of serving as your President, I promise to do everything I can every day, every minute, every second, to make sure this is a country where hard work and responsibility mean something and everybody can get ahead. Not just those at the very top, not just those who know how to work the system, but everybody.

That's what America's always been about. That's what America is going to be about today and tomorrow and 10 years from now and 20 years from now. And with the help of people like Richard Cordray, that's the country that we will always be.

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:26 p.m. in the North Gymnasium. In his remarks, he referred to Richard A. Cordray, Director-designate, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

Remarks at the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia *January 5, 2012*

Good morning, everybody. The United States of America is the greatest force for freedom and security that the world has ever known. And in no small measure, that's because we've built the best trained, best led, best equipped military in history, and as Commander in Chief, I'm going to keep it that way.

Indeed, all of us on this stage—every single one of us—have a profound responsibility to every soldier, sailor, airman, marine, and coast-guardsmen who puts their life on the line for America. We owe them a strategy with well-defined goals, to only send them into harm's way when it's absolutely necessary, to give them the equipment and the support that they

need to get the job done, and to care for them and their families when they come home. That is our solemn obligation.

And over the past 3 years, that's what we've done. We've continued to make historic investments in our military: our troops and their capabilities, our military families, and our veterans. And thanks to their extraordinary service, we've ended our war in Iraq. We've decimated Al Qaida's leadership. We've delivered justice to Usama bin Laden, and we've put that terrorist network on the path to defeat. We've made important progress in Afghanistan, and we've begun to transition so Afghans can assume more responsibility for their own security. We