

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks on the Federal Budget

March 17, 2009

Hello, everybody. Happy St. Patrick's Day. Green tie, not bad, huh? Conrad didn't get the memo. You didn't, either.

Good morning. With the budget committees hard at work this week, I wanted to meet with Chairman Conrad and Chairman Spratt to talk about the progress they're making on this budget resolution.

Because these are no ordinary times, I don't just view this budget document as numbers on a page or a laundry list of programs, I see it as an economic blueprint for our future, a foundation on which to build a recovery that lasts.

Now, this budget does not attempt to solve every problem or address every issue. Because of the massive deficit we inherited and the enormous costs of this financial crisis, we have made some tough choices that will cut our deficit in half by the end of my first term and reduce it by \$2 trillion over the next decade. That will bring discretionary spending for domestic programs as a share of the economy to its lowest level in nearly half a century.

What we will not cut back, however, are those investments that are directly linked to our long-term prosperity. As I said last week, we can't go back to a bubble economy, an economy based on reckless speculation and spending beyond our means, on bad credit and inflated home prices, and some of the shenanigans that have been taking place on Wall Street. Such activity does not lead to the creation of lasting wealth. It leads to the illusion of prosperity, and as we're finding out, it hurts us all in the end.

And that's why this budget makes the investments that will lead to real growth and real prosperity, investments that will make a difference in the lives of this generation and future generations because it makes us more productive.

Because so many Americans are just one illness or medical emergency away from bankruptcy, we have made a historic commitment to health care reform in this budget, reform that will finally lower costs for families, businesses, and State governments; reform that's not a luxury, but a necessity if we hope to bring down the cost of Medicare and Medicaid so that we can reduce our deficit in the long run. This is a fight that Kent Conrad and John Spratt have been fighting for a long time. The two gentlemen standing with me today, they've been leaders in efforts to get these entitlement programs under control, and they understand that if we don't solve the problem of health care costs now, we are not going to be able to get a handle on entitlements down the road.

Because we know that the countries who out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow, this budget also invests in a complete and competitive education for every American, in early childhood education programs that work, in high standards and accountability for our schools, in rewards for teachers who succeed, and an affordable college education for anyone who wants to go. That's the reason the three of us are standing here today. None of us were born with a silver spoon in our mouths, but we got a great education. And if we combine additional resources with a commitment to reform, then I think we can deliver that for every American child.

Because we know that the new jobs and new industries of tomorrow will involve harnessing renewable resources—renewable sources of energy, this budget will finally spark the transformation we need to create those jobs and those businesses right here in America. It makes clean energy the profitable kind of energy, and it invests in technologies like wind power and solar power, advanced biofuels, clean coal, fuel-efficient cars and trucks.

And because millions of Americans are already struggling under the weight of their monthly bills and mortgage payments, this budget does not raise the taxes of any family making less than \$250,000 a year by a single dime. In fact, 95 percent of all working families will receive a tax cut as a result of our recovery plan.

Now, there are those who say the plans in this budget are too ambitious to enact; to say that—they say that in the face of challenges that we face, we should be trying to do less than more. What I say is that the challenges we face are too large to ignore. The cost of our health care is too high to ignore. The dependence on oil is too dangerous to ignore. Our education deficit is growing too wide to ignore. To kick these problems down the road for another 4 years or another 8 years would be to continue the same irresponsibility that led us to this point. That's not why I ran for this office. I didn't come here to pass on our problems to the next President or the next generation; I came here to solve them.

I know that there are some on Wall Street and in Washington who've said that we should only focus on the banking crisis and one problem at a time. Well, we're spending a lot of time focusing on this banking crisis, and we will continue to do so because until we get liquidity flowing again, we will not fully recover. But the American people don't have the luxury of just focusing on Wall Street. They don't have the luxury of choosing to pay either their mortgage or their medical bills. They don't get to pick between paying for their kids' college tuition and saving enough money for retirement. They have to do all these things. They have to confront all these problems, and as a consequence, so do we.

Now, there's been a lot of discussion about this budget already, and I hope we engage in a healthy debate going forward. The challenges we face are not partisan. We're going to get some numbers with respect to the budget that may make this even tougher in the coming couple of weeks. The answers don't have to be partisan, and I welcome and encourage proposals and improvements from both Democrats and Republicans in the coming days.

But the one thing I will say is this: With the magnitude of the challenges we face right now, what we need in Washington are not more political tactics; we need more good ideas. We don't need more point-scoring; we need more problem-solving. So if there are Members of Congress who object to specific policies and proposals in this budget, then I ask them to be ready and willing to propose constructive, alternative solutions. If certain aspects of this budget people don't think work, provide us some ideas in terms of what you do. "Just say no" is the right advice to give your teenagers about drugs. It is not an acceptable response to whatever economic policy is proposed by the other party.

The American people sent us here to get things done. And in this moment of enormous challenge, they are watching and waiting for us to lead. Let's show them that we're equal to this task before us. Let's pass a budget that puts this Nation on the road to lasting prosperity. I know Kent Conrad is committed to doing that; John Spratt is committed to doing that; I'm committed to doing that. We're going to need everybody working together to get this thing done.

All right? Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:02 a.m. in Room 350 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Sen. Kent Conrad, chairman, Senate Budget Committee; and Rep. John M. Spratt, Jr., chairman, House Committee on the Budget.

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