

OPPORTUNITY AGENDA REMARKS AS DELIVERED
January 8, 2014

Family is important to Hoosiers. We work hard every day to care and provide for our loved ones and to give our children and grandchildren the opportunity to live healthy and fulfilling lives.

We also recognize that strong families are often built on good jobs. Good jobs allow us to put food on the table, educate our children, and ultimately retire in dignity. And good jobs are, of course, critical for stronger communities and a vibrant economy. It all starts with a job. Without good jobs, nothing else works.

As I have said before, most Americans think Congress can do something—even if it's just not doing any harm—to help create jobs and strengthen our economy. Unfortunately, over the last year, the partisan gridlock that has too-often defined Congress has been in full force.

During the starkest example of this gridlock, the government shutdown, a poll found that Americans cited Congress as the single biggest threat to our economy. That should have been a wake-up call for all of us; a clear signal to collectively focus on working together to give our families the opportunity to compete and succeed in the American economy.

Opportunity means creating the conditions for businesses to expand and to hire more workers. It means an economic environment that encourages the private sector to invest and innovate in an ever-changing global economy. And it means providing American workers with the training they need to get the skills and education necessary to fill the jobs available today and to adapt to fill the jobs and careers of the future.

As we start a new year, I encourage us all to refocus our efforts and our attention on the responsibilities to the families that we represent. And to that end, I am focused on my Opportunity Agenda—a blueprint of common sense policies designed to expand economic opportunities for Hoosier workers and workers all across the country—for businesses and their families in four critical areas that will help create more good jobs.

- Number one: Going all-in on American energy,
- Number two: Providing American workers with the training to fill the jobs available today,
- Number three: Investing in infrastructure, and
- And number four: Keeping our country competitive through exports and innovations.

Why are these four areas important to families across the country?

As [Madam] President knows, a strong domestic energy economy is at the foundation of our potential for economic success. Affordable, reliable energy allows families to heat their homes and travel to work and school. Affordable, reliable energy ensures businesses can manufacture products efficiently, on time, and can compete in the global economy.

And affordable, reliable American energy ensures that we are investing our money here at home rather than, each year, sending hundreds of billions of dollars overseas to buy energy that's already here in the United States. The production of affordable, reliable American energy here at home creates jobs—here at home, not overseas.

Our country is blessed with abundant energy resources. In fact, in my state of Indiana we produce coal, biofuels, wind and solar energy, and natural gas—and we can do more.

Going all-in on American energy also means establishing smart regulations that protect our environment while also allowing our economy to grow. My home State of Indiana is a large producer of coal—as I know your home state of North Dakota is. We are annually in the top ten of coal-producing states in the nation. The coal industry supports more than 3,000 jobs in 10 southwestern Indiana counties and contributes over \$750 million to our state’s economy.

Hoosiers count on affordable, reliable energy from our home-state coal. This is why efforts to regulate carbon dioxide emissions at coal plants should be realistic about the technology that exists now and not negatively impact our economy. If we don’t address these standards in a common sense way, the affordable, reliable energy that Hoosier families and businesses depend on is in doubt. We should also continue full speed ahead on technology efforts that will make coal a cleaner and cleaner energy source for all of our energy needs in the years ahead.

Indiana is also a leader in biofuel production, where more than 600 Hoosiers work at 13 ethanol plants and five biodiesel plants across our state. I have seen firsthand the good work being done at many of these plants. They use products grown here at home to produce fuel here at home to power vehicles here at home.

With ethanol and other biofuels, we aren’t—again—sending our hard-earned money overseas. We’re putting our neighbors to work. We’re putting their hard work into creating more energy and more opportunities in our communities and across our country. This industry is another excellent example of American-made energy and American-made entrepreneurial leadership.

Second, it is very important that we help our workforce hit the ground running by improving workforce development and training. The Department of Labor estimates that there are 3.9 million job openings in the United States right now, despite a national unemployment rate of 7% and millions of Americans looking for work.

Estimates by the Manufacturing Institute indicate there are as many as 600,000 job openings in our country that remain unfilled because employers cannot able to find workers with the necessary skills to do that job. We must make a better effort to close this “skills gap.”

I often hear from Hoosier business owners, from educators, from workers about the pressing need to close the skills gap and have people trained in all of these opportunities and skills. Workers need to know that the time they spend training is more likely to lead to employment in a well-paying job, as employers are more likely to hire people they know have the training they need to be productive on day one.

Third, it is important that we invest in infrastructure. Indiana is called the Crossroads of America. In order to live up to our name, we need the best roads, the best rail, the best airports, and the best waterways—so we can continue to expand our logistics and other transportation industries. Today, 22 percent of Indiana’s bridges are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete. Seventeen percent of Indiana’s roads are in poor or mediocre condition.

A good way to create jobs in Indiana and across the country is to establish the right conditions for the private sector to invest in our country’s infrastructure. I have and will continue to support encouraging investment by requiring government agencies to work together to cut red tape, to set deadlines, and to increase transparency.

Madam President, we should be building things in this country, and that means expediting the transportation, energy, and other infrastructure projects that strengthen our economy.

Finally, it is important that we keep Hoosier—and all American—businesses and industries competitive through the promotion of exports and innovations. We produce some of the best quality products in the world—from automobiles to agricultural products to medical devices—and we should continue to look for opportunities to sell these products to the world.

Manufacturing accounts for more than 98% of Indiana's exports, and manufactured goods exports support nearly 23% of Indiana's manufacturing jobs. That's much higher than the national average. Small businesses account for nearly 17% of our exports. And we need to do more to promote the good work of these Hoosier businesses.

American businesses are competing in an increasingly challenging global economy, and we must promote a global economy that is built on responsible and fair trade policies. I am a longtime supporter of cracking down on currency manipulation, which results in an unfair playing field for American manufacturers. The Economic Policy Institute estimated that addressing global currency manipulation could reduce the U.S. goods trade deficit by up to \$400 billion and create several million jobs right here at home, reducing our national unemployment rate.

I supported enhanced oversight of currency exchange rates, including new requirements that the Commerce Department investigate claims of undervalued foreign currency at the request of a United States industry.

I also support using U.S. trade law to counter the economic harm to U.S. manufacturers caused by this currency manipulation and tools to address the impact of currency misalignment on U.S. industries. We all know: good trade policies create jobs, fuel economic growth, and benefit consumers both at home and abroad. Yet we also must remember that trade only works with everyone playing by the same rules.

That's why I testified before the U.S. International Trade Commission regarding the importance of maintaining existing antidumping and countervailing duty orders against unfairly traded imports of hot-rolled steel. The steel industry supports over 150,000 jobs in Indiana, and these trade orders help maintain a level playing field for an already vulnerable domestic steel industry. Given a level playing field, Hoosier workers can compete with anyone in the world, which is why I was pleased the ITC ruled that these trade orders would be maintained. It is also critically important that our intellectual property is also respected and is also enforced.

We have a lot of work to do, but I am hopeful that Congress can learn from last year's dysfunction and start this year in a bipartisan way. Senators from both parties can agree: there's nothing more important to American families and American communities than good jobs. They want us to work for them and not worry about politics.

I look forward to continuing these efforts under my Opportunity Agenda. By working on common sense, bipartisan ideas to go all-in on American energy, to give workers the tools they need to hit the ground running, to invest in infrastructure, and to keep homegrown businesses competitive through exports and innovations, we can help lower unemployment and build a stronger economy.