

On the American Economy

Durham, North Carolina

June 13, 2011

As Prepared for Delivery—

It is great to be back in North Carolina, and it is great to be back at Cree. I actually visited this plant about three years ago, when I was still running for this office. I've got more gray hairs now. But I've got a better plane, too. So it's a fair trade.

That day, a great guy gave me a heck of an introduction. He introduced himself by saying, "I'm a Cree employee, and I help build the most energy-efficient LEDs in the world. That's what I do." His name was David Jones. I just got to see him again as I took a tour of your new LED production line – which he now runs – and it's easy to see why you guys are so proud to say that.

Today, the small business that a group of N.C. State engineering students founded almost 25 years ago is a global company with 5,000 employees. Next month, your new production line will begin running 24-7. And soon, you'll add another 400,000 square feet of space on a new site next door. You are helping lead the clean energy revolution. You are helping lead the comeback of American manufacturing. This is a company where the future will be won.

So David was telling the truth when he said how great it is to work here and how grateful he is for the opportunities it provides. But I remember something else he mentioned that day. He talked about how, even with a good job at a great company, it was getting tougher for working folks to provide for their families without having to cut corners. I'll never forget the way he put it – he said, "where am I squeezing that balloon to make sure my family has a life; that we are moving forward; [that] we're progressing?" That was even before the bottom fell out of the economy, and a vicious recession made things that much tougher for working families.

The world has changed since then. And for a lot of our friends and neighbors, that change has been painful. Today, the single most serious economic problem we face is getting people back to work. And even though we've added more than 2 million private sector jobs over the last 15 months, I'm not satisfied. Not until everyone who wants a good job that offers a little security has one. Not until empty storefronts in town are open for business again. Not until working families feel that they're moving forward again. That's what drives me every day I go to work. You. Your families. Your jobs. Your dreams, and everything it takes to keep them in reach.

Now, our economic challenges were years in the making, and it'll take years to get back to where we need to be. But for all the hits we've taken, we are still America. We've got the largest economy in the world, the best workers in the world, the finest universities and most successful companies in the world. We've

got everything we need to help our workers adapt and help our fellow Americans through. But it's going to take all of us working together – the private sector, academia, and government. And that's what I came back to Cree to talk about today.

I brought some folks with me, too – a group we call the Council on Jobs and Competitiveness. These are leaders who have decades of experience in running businesses, creating jobs, and understanding what it takes to grow our economy and strengthen our middle class. They've come from business, labor, academia, and most importantly from outside Washington, to dedicate their time and energy to this task. And I told them I want to hear smart, forward-thinking ideas to quicken the pace of job growth and make sure our economy and our workers can adapt to changing times.

We just had the opportunity to meet backstage to talk about how we get our job creation engine running faster, and I'd like to highlight a couple of their ideas that apply to companies like this.

Now, the advanced manufacturing you do here requires skilled workers. And you guys are lucky – you've got excellent schools nearby, like UNC, N.C. State, and Duke. You can basically hold your own talent draft – not just in basketball, but when it comes to highly-skilled workers. And Durham Public Schools has strengthened that talent pipeline by forming a school of engineering at Southern High School, which celebrated its first graduating class last week.

Here's why this is so important. Right now, there are more than four job-seekers for every job opening in America. But when it comes to science and high-tech fields, the opposite is true: businesses like this tell me they're having a hard time finding workers to fill their job openings.

That's because today, only 14 percent of all undergraduate students enroll in what we call the STEM subjects – science, technology, engineering, and math. Of those students, one-third will switch out of those fields, and only about 2 in 5 will graduate with a STEM degree or certification within six years. We can do better than that. We must do better than that. If we're going to make sure the good jobs of tomorrow stay in America, we need to make sure all our companies have a steady stream of skilled workers to draw from just as you do.

Last year, for example, we brought together companies and community colleges to forge pipelines right from the classroom to the office or factory floor – helping workers find better jobs, and companies find the right workers. Last week, we announced new commitments by the private sector, colleges, and the National Association of Manufacturers to make it possible for 500,000 community college students to earn industry-accepted credentials for manufacturing jobs that companies across America are looking to fill.

And today, with the leadership of the Jobs Council, we're announcing an all-hands-on-deck strategy to train 10,000 new American engineers every year. Private sector companies are teaming up to help us promote STEM education, offer students incentives to finish those degrees, and help universities fund those programs. They're even going to double their summer internship hiring. We're talking about companies like Intel, whose CEO Paul Otellini is here today. Because we know that if we're going to maintain our

leadership in technology and innovation, our best companies need the world's brightest workers – American workers.

That brings me to a second idea we discussed. At Cree, you're putting people back to work in a field that has the potential to create an untold number of new jobs and new businesses right here in America – and that's clean energy. My Administration has invested heavily in clean energy manufacturing, because I want to see the LEDs and solar panels and wind turbines and electric cars of tomorrow made right here in the U.S.A. We invested in this company with a tax credit that allowed you to boost capacity, lower costs, and hire hundreds of new workers. And with a grant from the Department of Energy, you've made incredible breakthroughs in smart grid technology to transmit clean, renewable energy across the country more efficiently at less cost.

Breakthroughs like those have the potential to create new jobs in other sectors of the economy, too. Think about it. You make energy-efficient lighting that can save businesses and consumers a lot of money. There are a lot of buildings that need upgrading. And there are a lot of workers ready to do it. Construction workers were hit harder than anyone by the recession. More than one in six are out of work. And that makes no sense when there's so much of America to rebuild.

That's the idea behind what we call the Better Buildings Initiative – putting people back to work doing the work America needs done. Upgrading buildings for energy efficiency could save America's businesses up to \$40 billion a year on their utility bills – money that could be better spent growing and hiring new workers. It will boost manufacturing of energy-efficient products. It will put contractors and construction workers back on the job. It's a win-win-win proposition. Today, the members of my Jobs Council updated me on their efforts to push this initiative in the private sector. And they're working closely with a champion for this kind of energy innovation, President Bill Clinton, whom I asked to co-lead the effort with them.

These aren't solutions to every problem we face. But they will help us move forward. And we are going to pursue them and any other good ideas, no matter where they come from. Because even though this is a big country with big opinions, and we won't always agree with each other on everything, we can agree on some basic things. Like educating our children and training our workers to be the best in the world. Like investing in the research and technology that leads to new ideas and new industries. Like developing clean energy and the manufacturing jobs that come with it, and rebuilding our infrastructure and the jobs that creates, too. That's what it takes to grow our economy. That's what it takes to help our people prosper. That's how we'll get there.

And I promise you, we will get there. I know that because I've seen it here, where you're helping lead the clean energy revolution. I've seen it across the Midwest, where automakers are coming back and hiring again, even after reading their own obituaries just two years ago. I've seen it from coast to coast, where men and women are testing new ideas, starting new businesses, bringing new products to market and helping America come back stronger than before.

So I am optimistic about our future. Americans don't respond to trial by lowering our sights, downscaling our dreams, or settling for something less. We are a people who dream big, even when times are tough. We

are a people who reach forward. We are a people who look to the horizon and remember that together, there's nothing we can't do. And as long as I have the privilege of being your President, I'm going to be right there with you, every step of the way, fighting for a brighter future for this community, for North Carolina, and for the United States of America. Thank you, God Bless You, and God Bless America.