

“BELIEVE”

Just two days before his joint session address to Congress, Obama said this in a speech to the AFL-CIO:

And I continue to believe that a public option within the basket of insurance choices would help improve quality and bring down costs.

After the speech finished, Chuck Todd came on and said something like, "progressives have to be disappointed." Todd's point, I think, was that Obama didn't really mean it. It was weak tea designed to fire up Obama's labor audience but ultimately Obama was going to drop the public option.

And it may well have been.

But what Todd doesn't seem to get is that Obama stands to lose more if he utters those words—if he acknowledges our point, that the public option is key to real reform, to bringing down costs—than having not uttered them.

So while Todd may take Obama's weak tea mention of the public option as so much weak tea, he seems to be missing that any such a mention is only going to further inflame progressives if and when Obama sacrifices something he "believes" in just a few days.

Here's the complete speech, as written (note, he said "EFCA" instead of "Employee Free Choice Act" when he delivered it):

Hello Cincinnati. Hello Ohio. I can't think of a better place to be on Labor Day than at America's biggest Labor Day picnic—with the workers and families of the Cincinnati AFL-CIO.

First, give a big round of applause to Charlie. Charlie reminds us that in these tough times, America's working men and women are ready to

roll up their sleeves and get back to work.

I want to salute your AFL-CIO local leaders: Executive Secretary-Treasurer Doug Sizemore, President Joe Zimmer and state President Joe Rugola. And your outstanding national leaders: a man who we thank for devoting his life to working Americans-President John Sweeney. And the man who will pick up the mantle of leadership-who we need to succeed because a strong labor movement is part of a strong economy- Secretary-Treasurer Rich Trumka.

Although Ohio's terrific Governor Ted Strickland couldn't be here, we have Lieutenant Governor Lee Fisher, Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner, Attorney General Richard Cordray, Cincinnati Mayor Mark Mallory, and Hamilton County Commission President David Pepper.

We're joined by members of Ohio's congressional delegation: Congressman Steve Driehaus and my great friend-who is at the forefront of every fight for Ohio's working men and women, including the battle for health insurance reform-Senator Sherrod Brown.

And I'm proud to be here with a leader who is re-energizing the Department of Labor-and a daughter of union members-Secretary Hilda Solis. And my director of recovery for auto communities and workers-Ed Montgomery.

Now, like a lot of Americans, you're having some fun today. Taking the day off. Spending time with the kids. Enjoying some good music and good food-some famous Cincinnati chili. But today we also pause. To remember. To reflect. To reaffirm.

We remember that the rights and benefits we enjoy today were not simply handed out to America's working men and women. They had to be won.

They had to be fought for, by men and women of courage and conviction, from the factory floors of the Industrial Revolution to the shopping aisles of today's superstores. They stood up and

spoke out to demand a fair shake; an honest day's pay for an honest day's work. Many risked their lives. Some gave their lives. Some made it a cause of their lives-like Senator Ted Kennedy, who we remember today.

So let us never forget: much of what we take for granted-the 40-hour work week, the minimum wage, health insurance, paid leave, pensions, Social Security, Medicare-they all bear the union label. It was the American worker-union men and women-who returned from World War II to make our economy the envy of the world. It was labor that helped build the largest middle class in history. So even if you're not a union member, every American owes something to America's labor movement.

As we remember this history, let us reflect on its meaning in our own time. Like so many Americans, you work hard and meet your responsibilities. You play by the rules and pay your bills. But in recent years, the American Dream seemed to slip away, because from Washington to Wall Street, too often a different culture prevailed.

Wealth was valued over work, selfishness over sacrifice, greed over responsibility, the right to organize undermined rather than strengthened.

That's what we saw. And while it may have worked out well for a few at the top, it sure didn't work out well for our country. That culture-and the policies that flowed from it-undermined the middle class and helped create the greatest economic crisis of our time.

So today, on this Labor Day, we reaffirm our commitment. To rebuild.

To live up to the legacy of those who came before us. To combine the enduring values that have served us so well for so long-hard work and responsibility-with new ideas for a new century. To ensure that our great middle class remains the backbone of our economy-not just a vanishing ideal we celebrate at picnics once a year as summer turns to fall.

That's what we've been working to do every day since I took office.

Now, some people have already forgotten how bad it was just seven months ago. A financial system on the verge of collapse. About 700,000 workers losing their jobs each month. The worst recession of our lifetimes threatening to become another Great Depression.

That's why we took bold, swift action-passing an unprecedented Recovery Act, and doing it without the usual Washington earmarks and pork-barrel spending. And, Ohio, it's working.

We've given 95 percent of America's working families a tax cut-4.5 million families in Ohio, including here in Cincinnati. We've cut taxes for small businesses, and made new loans to more than 1,000 small businesses in Ohio so they can grow and hire more workers.

We've extended unemployment benefits for 12 million Americans, including Charlie and nearly 570,000 Ohio citizens. Across America, we've saved the jobs of tens of thousands of state and local workers-including teachers and first responders here in Ohio. We're rebuilding America's infrastructure, including the improvements to I-75 in Hamilton County-led by a local Cincinnati contractor-and more than 200 other highway projects across Ohio.

And we're making an historic commitment to innovation-much of it still to come in the months and year ahead: doubling our capacity to generate renewable energy; building a new smart grid to carry electricity from coast to coast; laying down broadband lines and high-speed rail lines; and providing the largest boost in basic research in history.

So our Recovery plan is working. The financial system has been saved from collapse. Home sales are up. We're seeing signs of life in the auto industry. Business investment is starting to stabilize. For the first time in 18 months, we're seeing growth in manufacturing.

On Friday, we learned that the economy lost another 216,000 jobs in August. And whenever Americans are losing jobs-especially so many-that's simply unacceptable. But for the second straight month, we lost fewer jobs than the month before and it was the fewest jobs lost in a year. So make no mistake. We're moving in the right direction.

Ohio, we're on the road to recovery.

But we've still got a long way to go. So we will not rest, we will not let up. Not until workers looking for jobs can find them-good jobs that sustain families and sustain dreams. Not until responsible mortgage-owners can stay in their homes. Not until we have a full economic recovery and all Americans have their shot at the American Dream.

But we can't do that if we go back to that old economy-overleveraged banks, inflated profits and maxed-out credit cards. An economy of bubbles and bursts, where your wages and incomes stagnate while corporate profits soar. So even as we recover from the recession and work to cut the deficit in half, we have to build a new foundation for prosperity in America.

An America with a reformed financial regulation system that protects consumers and the entire financial system so we never have a crisis like this again.

An America where energy reform creates green jobs that can never be outsourced and that finally frees America from the grip of foreign oil.

An America that commits to education-because the countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow and the best jobs will go to the best educated-whether they live in Cincinnati or Shanghai. So we've got to do a better job educating our sons and daughters.

An America that once again invests in the middle class, which is why I've created our Task Force on Middle Class Working Families, led by Vice

President Joe Biden, to make sure that our policies always benefit you-America's workers.

And today we're taking another step. I'm naming Ron Bloom to lead our efforts to revitalize the sector that helped build the middle class:

American manufacturing. Ron has worked with steelworkers, service employees and management to create new jobs. He's helped guide my auto task force. And as my new point person on manufacturing, he'll help us craft the policies that will create the next generation of manufacturing jobs and ensure American competitiveness in the 21st century.

And, yes, we're building an America where health insurance reform delivers more stability and security to every American-the many who have insurance today and the millions who don't.

Now, I'll have a lot more to say about this Wednesday night, and I don't want to give it all away. But let me just say this. We've been fighting for quality, affordable health care for every American for nearly a century-since Teddy Roosevelt. The Congress and the country have been engaged in a vigorous debate for many months. And debate is good, because we have to get this right. But in every debate there comes a time to decide, a time to act. And Ohio, that time is now.

We've never been this close. We've never had such broad agreement on what needs to be done. And because we're so close to real reform, the special interests are doing what they always do-trying to scare the American people and preserve the status quo.

But I've got a question for them: What's your answer? What's your solution? The truth is, they don't have one. It's do nothing. And we know what that future looks like. Insurance companies raking in the profits while discriminating against people because of pre-existing conditions and denying or dropping coverage when you get sick. It means you're never negotiating about higher wages, because you're spending all

your time just protecting the benefits you already have.

It means premiums continuing to skyrocket three times faster than your wages. More families pushed into bankruptcy. More businesses cutting more jobs. More Americans losing their health insurance-14,000 every day. And it means more Americans dying every day just because they don't have insurance.

But that's not the future I see for America. I see reform where we bring stability and security to folks who have insurance today. Where you never again have to worry about going without coverage-if you lose your job, change your job or get sick. Where there is a cap on your out-of-pocket expenses, so you don't have to worry that a serious illness will break you and your family. Where you never again have to worry that you or someone you love will be denied coverage because of a pre-existing condition.

I see reform where Americans and small businesses that are shut out of health insurance today will be able to purchase coverage at a price they can afford. Where they'll be able to shop and compare in a new health insurance exchange-a marketplace where competition and choice will continue to hold down cost and help deliver them a better deal. **And I continue to believe that a public option within the basket of insurance choices would help improve quality and bring down costs.**

I see reform where we protect our senior citizens by closing the gaps in their Medicare prescription coverage that costs millions of older Americans thousands of dollars every year out of their own pockets; reforms that will preserve Medicare and put it on a sounder financial footing by cutting waste and fraud and the hundreds of billions of dollars in unwarranted public subsidies to an already profitable insurance industry.

I want a health insurance system that works as well for the American people as it does for the

insurance industry. They should be free to make a profit. But they also have to be fair. They also have to be accountable.

Security and stability for folks who have health insurance. Help for those who don't-the coverage they need at a price they can afford.

Finally bringing costs under control. That's the reform we need.

That's the reform we're fighting for. And that's why it's time to do what's right for America's working families. To put aside the partisanship. To come together as a nation. To pass health insurance reform now-this year.

And few have fought harder or longer for health care and America's workers than you-our brothers and sisters of organized labor. And just as we know that we must adapt to all the changes and challenges of a global economy, we also know this: in good economic times and bad, labor is not part of the problem. Labor is part of the solution.

That's why Secretary Solis has made it a priority at the Labor Department to protect workers-your safety, your benefits, your right to organize and bargain collectively. It's why some of the first executive orders I issued overturned the previous administration's attempts to stifle organized labor. It's why I support the Employee Free Choice Act-to level the playing field so it's easier for employees who want a union to form a union. Because when labor is strong, America is strong. When we all stand together, we all rise together.

And that is why the first piece of legislation I signed into law was the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act-guaranteeing equal pay for equal work.

Lilly worked at an Alabama factory. She did her job and did it well.

Then, after nearly two decades, she discovered that for years she was paid less than her male colleagues-for doing the very same work. Over

the years, she had lost hundreds of thousands of dollars in wages and in pension and Social Security benefits.

Lilly could have just moved on. Instead, this Alabama grandmother made a decision-principle was at stake. She stood up and spoke out for what was right-all the way to the Supreme Court, then Congress, and finally the White House, where I signed the law that bears her name.

That's the lesson of this day-that some things are always worth fighting for. Equal pay. Fair wages. Dignity in the workplace. Justice on the job. An economy that works for everyone, because in America there are no second-class citizens. An economy where you can make a living and care for your families. Where you leave your kids something better.

Where we live up to our fundamental ideals-those words put on paper some 200 years ago. That we are all created equal; that we all deserve a chance to pursue our happiness and achieve our goals.

That is the calling to which we are summoned this Labor Day. That is the cause of my presidency. And that is the commitment we must fulfill to preserve the American Dream for all of America's working families.