

OBAMA TRIES TO SELL FREE TRADE IN HOLLAND, MI

I'll have more to say about Obama's speech at Johnson Controls later today when I get back to reliable Toobz.

But here are my first impressions.

First, here's the order of emphasis in his speech:

1. Freedom
2. Debt and compromise
3. The kinds of investments that make this factory possible

That's a problem. Republicans like Crazy Pete Hoekstra and Rick Snyder have already come to these factories to claim credit for the jobs. And they're not going to talk about how these jobs depended on government investment.

I was unsure whether Obama was going to just ignore his pitch for trade. He didn't. But not only did it come later in his pitch of late (after payroll tax deductions), but he changed the delivery. He claimed that if we pass these trade deals, people around the world will be driving Fords and Chevys.

Of course, people around the world already are driving Fords and Chevys. Made in places like Brazil and Mexico and China. Trade deals won't change where the American-branded cars sold in Colombia and Panama and Korea are made.

The one exception, of course, is the most dangerous. Korea will import electric Volts and Ford Transits—they even adopted a change in KORUS to allow for them. But how long do you think the real leader in battery technology—Korea—will stand for the importation

of batteries from MI? I have long believed—and still do—that KORUS may kill just this kind of factory, because once GM starts building Volts in Korea, they'll export those higher-margin Volts to other markets.

In any case, the applause when Obama talked about trade was much quieter than the other applause lines.

One more thing about this event. It was, I believe without exception, the whitest Democratic event I have ever attended in MI. Now, Holland is whiter than much of MI (though it has a growing Latino population). But Grand Rapids, which is just a half hour away, is racially balanced. Moreover, I know an auto supply plant about 10 miles from here that has more Latinos working at it than were in this room.

That's probably more a testament to who the VIPs were that got invited to this event (and that the employees who have been hired here thus far tend to be white collar workers). But still, I found it striking.