

President Obama's Press Conference

Washington, November 3, 2010

Good afternoon, everybody. Last night I had a chance to speak to the leaders of the House and the Senate and reached out to those who had both won and lost in both parties. I told John Boehner and Mitch McConnell that I look forward to working with them. And I thanked Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid for their extraordinary leadership over the last two years.

After what I'm sure was a long night for a lot of you -- and needless to say it was for me -- I can tell you that some election nights are more fun than others. Some are exhilarating; some are humbling. But every election, regardless of who wins and who loses, is a reminder that in our democracy, power rests not with those of us in elected office, but with the people we have the privilege to serve.

Over the last few months I've had the opportunity to travel around the country and meet people where they live and where they work, from backyards to factory floors. I did some talking, but mostly I did a lot of listening. And yesterday's vote confirmed what I've heard from folks all across America: People are frustrated -- they're deeply frustrated -- with the pace of our economic recovery and the opportunities that they hope for their children and their grandchildren. They want jobs to come back faster, they want paychecks to go further, and they want the ability to give their children the same chances and opportunities as they've had in life.

The men and women who sent us here don't expect Washington to solve all their problems. But they do expect Washington to work for them, not against them. They want to know that their tax dollars are being spent wisely, not wasted, and that we're not going to leave our children a legacy of debt. They want to know that their voices aren't being drowned out by a sea of lobbyists and special interests and partisan bickering. They want business to be done here openly and honestly.

Now, I ran for this office to tackle these challenges and give voice to the concerns of everyday people. Over the last two years, we've made progress. But, clearly, too many Americans haven't felt that progress yet, and they told us that yesterday. And as President, I take responsibility for that.

What yesterday also told us is that no one party will be able to dictate where we go from here, that we must find common ground in order to set -- in order to make progress on some uncommonly difficult challenges. And I told John Boehner and Mitch McConnell last night I am very eager to sit down with members of both parties and figure out how we can move forward together.

I'm not suggesting this will be easy. I won't pretend that we will be able to bridge every difference or solve every disagreement. There's a reason we have two parties in this country, and both Democrats and Republicans have certain beliefs and certain principles that each feels cannot be compromised. But what I think the American people are expecting, and what we owe them, is to focus on those issues that affect their jobs, their security, and their future: reducing our deficit, promoting a clean energy economy, making sure that our children are the best educated in the world, making sure that we're making the investments in technology that will allow us to keep our competitive edge in the global economy.

Because the most important contest we face is not the contest between Democrats and Republicans. In this century, the most important competition we face is between America and our economic

competitors around the world. To win that competition, and to continue our economic leadership, we're going to need to be strong and we're going to need to be united.

None of the challenges we face lend themselves to simple solutions or bumper-sticker slogans. Nor are the answers found in any one particular philosophy or ideology. As I've said before, no person, no party, has a monopoly on wisdom. And that's why I'm eager to hear good ideas wherever they come from, whoever proposes them. And that's why I believe it's important to have an honest and civil debate about the choices that we face. That's why I want to engage both Democrats and Republicans in serious conversations about where we're going as a nation.

And with so much at stake, what the American people don't want from us, especially here in Washington, is to spend the next two years refighting the political battles of the last two. We just had a tough election. We will have another in 2012. I'm not so naïve as to think that everybody will put politics aside until then, but I do hope to make progress on the very serious problems facing us right now. And that's going to require all of us, including me, to work harder at building consensus.

You know, a little over a month ago, we held a town hall meeting in Richmond, Virginia. And one of the most telling questions came from a small business owner who runs a tree care firm. He told me how hard he works and how busy he was; how he doesn't have time to pay attention to all the back-and-forth in Washington. And he asked, is there hope for us returning to civility in our discourse, to a healthy legislative process, so as I strap on the boots again tomorrow, I know that you guys got it under control? It's hard to have a faith in that right now, he said.

I do believe there is hope for civility. I do believe there's hope for progress. And that's because I believe in the resiliency of a nation that's bounced back from much worse than what we're going through right now -- a nation that's overcome war and depression, that has been made more perfect in our struggle for individual rights and individual freedoms.

Each time progress has come slowly and even painfully, but progress has always come -- because we've worked at it and because we've believed in it, and most of all, because we remembered that our first allegiance as citizens is not to party or region or faction, but to country -- because while we may be proud Democrats or proud Republicans, we are prouder to be Americans.

And that's something that we all need to remember right now and in the coming months. And if we do, I have no doubt that we will continue this nation's long journey towards a better future.