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President Obama Talks of Shared Responsibility



U.S. Chamber of Commerce headquarters looms large behind President Barack Obama and his senior advisors as they walk back to the White House following the president's speech at the Chamber on February 7, 2011.
Official White House Photo: Pete Souza

In a widely anticipated speech at the U.S. Chamber, President Obama said that spurring job growth, innovation, and U.S. competitiveness is a shared responsibility between government and the private sector.

“I’m here today because I am convinced, as Tom [Donohue] mentioned in his introduction, that we can and we must work together,” the president told a packed audience of small business owners, CEOs, industry association leaders, and Chamber staff at the February 7 event. He later added, “We need to make America the best place on earth to do business.”

If America is to win the future, Obama said, “We need to out-innovate, we need to out-educate, we need to out-build our competitors.” He called for investments in biotechnology, information technology and clean energy technology, education reform, and infrastructure improvements.

Said Chamber President and CEO Tom Donohue, “We share the president’s commitment to create good jobs, improve infrastructure, reform education, and enhance our competitiveness, but we need to put words into action.” Donohue called on the administration to complete free trade agreements with South Korea, Colombia, and Panama and present a comprehensive, multiyear plan for new infrastructure investments that will leverage upward of \$180 billion in private capital waiting to be invested.

The president also pledged to tear down barriers to economic success by seeking new opportunities and markets for U.S. goods, reforming the U.S. tax code, and removing outdated and unnecessary regulations. Although the Chamber supports these goals, it is eagerly awaiting details from the administration on how to achieve them.

While striking a conciliatory tone, the president challenged businesses. “Now is the time to invest in America ... if there’s a reason you don’t believe that this is the time to get off the sidelines, to hire and to invest, I want to know about it. I want to fix it.”

Donohue embraced the president’s message of shared responsibility. “We are meeting our responsibility and can do even more if our government takes smart steps to continue to foster business and job growth. It’s time for all of us to roll up our sleeves and take action on a jobs and competitiveness agenda.”

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