

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Press Center



Treasury Secretary Timothy F. Geithner Remarks at a Meeting of the Middle Class Task Force As Prepared for Delivery Milwaukee, Wisconsin

4/27/2010

TG-667

It's great to be here in Milwaukee. Mr. Vice President, it's great to be here with you, and with Congresswoman Moore, with Mayor Barrett and at this great university, with Chancellor Santiago.

It is excellent to be away from Washington.

Every time I get to visit a community like Milwaukee, I feel more optimistic about the country, about the fundamental strength of Americans.

And it is a great pleasure to travel with the Vice President.

Let me start with a story about this crisis.

The President and the Vice President were elected at a time of grave national crisis. Americans were scared. They had seen their savings fall on average 40 percent. Millions had lost their jobs and their homes. Thousands of businesses were failing. The damage reached more deeply into the middle class than any downturn since the Great Depression. The world had lost confidence in America. Business stopped. People felt they had to prepare for Armageddon.

Now, the President and the Vice President had a choice to make. They could decide to sit back and hope that the fire would burn itself out. They could have chosen a politically safe path. They could have debated and studied all the bad options for months and months. They could have waited for political consensus.

But they chose to act. The Obama-Biden strategy was to act – to act forcefully to put out the financial fire and to restore growth to the

And that was the right choice. Because of their willingness to do the hard things quickly, even though it was tough politically, we are now getting stronger.

Businesses are starting to hire workers back, to expand investment. Exports are growing. We've recovered hundreds of billions of dollars back from the large banks. House prices are rising not falling. The cost of a loan to buy a house or a car, to build a business or a new school, has fallen sharply. GM is repaying the government.

And we are coming back stronger and more quickly than many of us thought was possible.

Now we know it is still very hard out there, and we still have a long way to go and a lot of work to do to restore a sense of basic economic and financial security to middle class Americans.

But we are in a much stronger position today to address those challenges. And that is a tribute to the President and to the Vice President and to those in Congress who joined them in acting to fix the mess we started with and to build a stronger economy that works for all Americans.

Now, as you have seen on TV and read in the news, the United States Senate is debating whether to start debating whether to reform the financial system.

I think it is very important that Americans know what is at stake in this debate, why it is important, why it matters to them, and how the President's reforms will fix what is broken.

Financial reform is about protecting the financial security of all Americans, the old and the young, those working, and those who have already worked a life time.

It is about protecting consumers and investors from fraud and abuse, from financial predators preying on the innocent and unknowing.

It is about providing a stable source of affordable credit and capital to businesses, small and large.

It is about giving consumers and investors the information they need to make responsible decisions.

It is about helping local governments finance the constructing of a new school.

It is about protecting the American taxpayer from having to bear the burden of mistakes on Wall Street.

It is about making sure that when banks make mistakes, they take responsibility for those mistakes, and that those mistakes don't hurt the innocent and the responsible.

This is an important and just cause. It requires reform. Not small changes at the margin, but comprehensive change, clear rules with teeth, enforced by people who care.

These reforms won't satisfy everyone. They won't solve all our problems.

But they will fix what caused this crisis, and they will make future crises less likely and less damaging.

Now we need Washington to act.

Do not leave the debate to the banks and their protectors. This is about the business of America. And here at a University that has sent so many Americans out into the world to build great companies, you know how important credit and capital is to the entrepreneur and the innovator. We need a financial system that can finance future investment in real businesses that will make us stronger as a nation.

Mr. Vice President, it is an honor to serve with you.

Ladies and gentlemen, with great admiration, I introduce to you the Vice President of the United States.

###