



WisPolitics: Obama calls for tax changes to help companies that stay in U.S., punish those moving jobs overseas

2/16/2012

President Obama Wednesday called on Congress to overhaul the tax code to eliminate breaks for companies that ship jobs overseas and instead reward companies that stay and hire in the U.S.

Appearing at Master Lock, the president called for every multinational company to pay a basic minimum tax to ensure they do not benefit from moving jobs and profits overseas to avoid paying their fair share of taxes.

He also called for lowering the tax burden on manufacturers operating here, saying they should get aid to cover expenses for moving jobs back to the U.S., that high-tech manufacturers should see their deduction double for making products here, and that those relocating to communities hard hit by factories leaving town should get financing for a new plant, equipment or training for new workers.

“It is time to stop rewarding companies that ship jobs overseas and start rewarding companies that are creating jobs right here in the United States of America,” Obama said.

Obama said a number of companies have responded to his challenge in his State of the Union to begin bringing jobs back to the U.S. with a promise the country would do everything it could to succeed. He singled out as examples companies like Diamond Precision in Milwaukee, a machine manufacturer, and Collaborative Consulting, an information technology company looking to open a new call center in Wausau.

The president held up Master Lock as an example of companies that are “insourcing.” He praised the company in his State of the Union address for moving 100 jobs back to Milwaukee from China and said Master Lock’s Milwaukee plant is now running at full capacity for the first time in 15 years.

To help the company create even more jobs, Obama said, he’s asked Congress to commit to training 2 million Americans with skills that will lead to a job. That includes giving community colleges resources to become community career centers.

"At a time when so many Americans are out of work, there should not be any job openings, because every single job opening that comes up, somebody should be able to say, I want that job and I'm prepared and skilled to get it," Obama said.

State GOP Chair Brad Courtney knocked the visit as a taxpayer-financed campaign trip and said the president has failed to live up to his previous promises to lower health insurance premiums, move to end the country's dependence on foreign oil, create jobs and cut the deficit in half by the end of his first term.

"Sadly, the President's remarks were simply more of the same empty promises we've come to expect from the campaigner-in-chief," Courtney said. "Voters have grown weary of the president's stream of empty rhetoric, and Wisconsin families would like to know what happened to the promises he made when he first campaigned for his job three years ago?"

Ahead of the Obama addressing the crowd, Master Lock CEO John Heppner, wearing an blue shirt with an unbuttoned collar and no tie, said a key to the company's renewed success in Wisconsin was having trust between management and labor.

"We've figured out how to make this facility productive," Heppner said. "You guys helped us. Today, it's about trust. Today, we work together. We care more about our mutual success than our own, and it took a long time to get there."

John Drew, representing Local 469 of United Auto Workers, preceded the president on stage, drawing prolonged applause when he said, "Through the local union, Master Lock workers have a right to have a seat at the table and the right to collectively bargain."

"Master Lock is a great example of what can happen when a company and a union work together," Drew said.

The crowd was in a jovial mood, with workers applauding loudly, calling out affirmations to many of Obama's remarks and at one point chanting in unison, "Right now, right now!" after Obama said, "This Congress should send me the tax reforms right now, I will sign them right away."

Still, at least one employee was undecided on this fall's vote following the speech.

Chris Hironimus said he's still not convinced he will vote to re-elect Obama.

"I'll wait and see," he said. "It's a long time until November."

But Hironimus, an engineer who lives in Illinois and works in Master Lock's Oak Creek plant acknowledged that employees have been excited at the prospect of adding jobs and at the president's interest.

"He certainly fired up the crowd. he was very inspiring and he had a lot of good things to say," Hironimus said.

Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett watched Obama's speech from the floor, surrounded by a who's who of local Dem politicians, including Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele, U.S. Rep Gwen Moore, former Gov. Jim Doyle, State Sen. Lena Taylor, Assembly Minority Leader Peter Barca and Milwaukee Ald. Willie Hines.

Obama's speech included some lighter moments. He said Milwaukee was the closest he's been to his Chicago home in a while, and he was tempted to take a quick road trip to see the place.

Obama also joked about his past and future with Master Lock. He said he's been a good customer of the company because he couldn't always remember his combination and had to have them cut off, forcing him to buy new ones. He also eyed the "super" locks in the

plant and noted he'll soon be the father of two high school-aged daughters.

“For now, I'm just counting on the fact that when they go to school there are men with guns with them,” he said.

Obama was greeted at the Milwaukee airport by Gov. Scott Walker, Barrett and Moore, among others.

Walker, who has been critical of Obama for his comments on the collective bargaining fight in Wisconsin, gave the president a Milwaukee Brewers jersey with the number 1 and Obama's name on the back.

During a visit to Manitowoc last year, Walker gave Obama a Green Bay Packers jersey.

Walker originally planned to attend the Master Lock speech, but has been fighting the flu and opted to just meet Obama at the airport.

While waiting for the president, Walker showed the media the Obama jersey, and Barrett joked, “He's endorsing him today. A big endorsement.”

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