

Remarks by R. Thomas Buffenbarger
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Thank you for that kind introduction.

Barney and I disagree about lots of things – Sarbannes-Oxley’s impact on corporate boards, the Boy Scouts of America, the Red Sox and bank bailouts.

But we are in total agreement on this: He’s got one smart, savvy and tenacious sister: Ann Lewis.

And without Ann, none of us would be here today.

So, thank you, Ann Lewis, for being the exclamation point behind NO LIMITS!

This is an important inaugural event.

The work begun here will reflect on the woman who brought us together, who fought so hard for her Invisibles.

Hillary summed up our challenge succinctly. “With our ingenuity, innovative spirit and creativity,” Hillary said, “there are no limits to what is possible in America.”

Towards the end of this speech I will ask you to use some of that “ingenuity, innovative spirit and creativity” to end the scourge now afflicting her Invisibles.

But first, let me explain why I leapt at the chance to be here today.

The Machinists Union was the first major union to endorse Hillary Clinton --- and the last one to leave her side. We made her an honorary member of our union. And we followed her lead in endorsing Barack Obama for President of the United States.

We’re proud of those facts.

But nothing can compare with the satisfaction of knowing that an IAM member is America’s Secretary of State.

Nothing --- nothing at all --- can compare with our sense of pride knowing that Hillary Clinton is working every day to make America ascendant.

And there is nothing --- nothing at all --- that can place a ceiling on Hillary Clinton's accomplishments.

Or YOURS, for that matter.

There are NO LIMITS on what CAN be done by the dedicated, determined and driven women (and men) in this room.

And because there are NO LIMITS on what YOU can do, I turn to you for help.

Just a few hours ago, the Bureau of Labor Statistics announced that the national unemployment rate hit 10.2 percent in October.

Ten percent is an easy number to remember, but a hard number to grasp.

So I would like to show what ten percent looks like.

At your table is a map produced by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

It shows the AVERAGE ... ANNUAL ... UNEMPLOYMENT at the COUNTY LEVEL ... as of September 2009.

And TEN percent are all the counties tinted BLACK.

That map is OUR COUNTRY with 8.5 percent average annual unemployment.

October put us at 10.2 percent.

In a few more months, all those PURPLE counties will be BLACK.

So that map is OUR COUNTRY IN THE GRIP OF A JOBS CRISIS.

What does that map mean to you?

I know what it means to me.

It means 30,000 laid-off Machinists, 135,000 laid-off Steelworkers and even more laid-off Autoworkers.

It means unemployment levels of 29 percent in El Centro, 26 percent in Yuma, 17 percent in Detroit, 16 percent in Elkhart, and 12 percent in Los Angeles.

It means this is midnight in America.

And the dawn is a long, long way off.

Most of us remember the Reagan-Bush commercials from 1984 – the gauzy ones with the white house, white picket fence, the red, white and blue flag and the tag line, “it is morning in America.”

For America’s Invisibles, the morning only brings fresh worries, fearful choices and another day deeper in debt.

Being jobless is devastating.

It robs a man or woman of their sense of worth, sense of purpose and sense of identity.

Being jobless changes everything.

Try looking your kids in the eye as they leave for school.

Try waiting for calls that never come from prospective employers.

Try walking down the block knowing your neighbors know you’re out of work.

Try shopping NOT for groceries but for NECESSITIES – a few dollars at a time.

It ain’t easy.

And for America’s Invisibles, this Grave Recession has gone on too long.

How long?

This Grave Recession covers the final 400 days of the BUSH Administration and the first nine months of the current administration.

The BLAME for this unprecedented level of joblessness lands squarely on GEORGE BUSH ... on HIS corporate cronies ... and on HIS congressional allies.

President Obama did not create this jobs crisis.

Let me repeat that.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA did not create this jobs crisis.

He inherited this jobs crisis from George Bush.

He inherited an economy shedding jobs at the rate of 600,000 per month.

And President Barack Obama had the courage and foresight to push through an 800 billion dollar recovery plan.

But it takes time to move a nation of 300 million people.

Slowly and surely President Obama's economic stimulus is being felt.

On November 2nd, Paul Krugman wrote that "without the recovery act, the free fall would probably have continued, as unemployed workers slashed their spending, cash-strapped state and local governments engaged in mass layoffs, and more."

His words "AND MORE" are ominous.

There is a momentum to this jobs crisis, a momentum that keeps building in force with each passing month.

Percentages don't tell the whole story.

Today's official unemployment numbers come with over thirty pages of charts and tables.

If you pour over them, here's what you'll find:

- * 15.7 million Americans are unemployed.
- * 9.3 million Americans are working part-time involuntarily. They've been furloughed or had their hours cut.
- * 5.6 million Americans have looked for a job in the last year but could not find one.
- * Over 1.0 million Americans simply vanished from the BLS statistics since May.

When you add up those numbers, you reach 31.6 million Americans who are idled to some degree in this Grave Recession.

THIRTY-ONE MILLION is a CRISIS, a LONG-TERM CRISIS.

THIRTY-ONE MILLION means it is MIDNIGHT in AMERICA ... and the DAWN is a LONG, LONG WAY OFF.

That may sound hysterical.

It is not.

For 31 million Americans, it is the essence of hysteresis. (HYS – TER – E – SIS)

HYSTERESIS!

Larry Summers coined that term in 1986.

Back then, he saw long-term substantial unemployment as an indication that an economy had snapped.

Now Larry Summers is the Assistant to the President for Economic Policy.

And hysteresis is his challenge and constant companion.

Last month, Joshua Ramo wrote in Time Magazine about Summers' theory of hysteresis.

He explained that hysteresis occurs when the economy – and I quote – “snaps in such a way that it can never be put back together ... There's no way to restore what has just been smashed.”

Joshua Ramo is a smart guy.

Larry Summers is a genius.

And I'm a Machinist.

So one line in Ramo's op-ed caught my eye.

Ramo wrote – and I quote – “Is there really a demand for machinists?”

I sure hope so!

Over 30,000 IAM members have been laid off.

And they need to get back to work.

Fortunately, Joshua Ramo answered, “Yes – even in a recession.”

He went on to explain that “a million high-skilled jobs remain unfilled. This is why a fresh approach to job-making, one that focuses on mastery of skills ... matters.”

I don't know where those unfilled jobs are.

I wish I did.

But I do know we need a fresh approach to job-making.

And so does Larry Summers.

I have met Mr. Summers only once.

Ex-Harvard presidents simply don't travel in the same circles as journeyman Machinists.

Perhaps we should.

Attached to that BLS map are two items to stimulate your thinking --- and his.

The op-ed piece "Jobs Worth Fighting For" was published before the American Recovery Act was enacted.

The letter to President Barack Obama was delivered four months ago.

Together they outline a real world, workable response to what ails our country.

They describe policies to deal with this massive jobs crisis.

But frankly, they don't go far enough.

More unemployment compensation, more COBRA discounts, more mortgage relief – is needed.

But those measures ease the pain. They don't heal what ails our Nation.

And that's where YOUR ingenuity, YOUR innovative spirit and YOUR creativity comes into play.

I said earlier that I need your help.

And I do.

I believe there are NO LIMITS when ADAPTING historical precedents to end this jobs crisis.

The Works Progress Administration can be adapted, modernized and put back to work – at the county level.

JFK's ten percent investment tax credit can be reconfigured to spur business growth – at the county level.

So I ask you to think about other times when America came together to meet a challenge as large as this.

I ask you to think through new ways ignite the entrepreneurial drive of this Nation.

If you believe --- as I do --- that there are NO LIMITS when we put our BRAINS and our BRAWN behind a long term industrial initiative, one aimed at employing millions of Americans, one designed to make American factories hum again.

If you believe --- as I do --- there are NO LIMITS to what we can do if we put our heads together...

Then HELP craft a long term industrial initiative that keeps America ascendant.

HELP draft new policies...

HELP publicize new programs,

HELP persuade decision-makers.

HELP those 31 million Americans who need JOBS NOW!

And HELP us prove that there are absolutely NO LIMITS when it comes to putting millions of Americans back to work NOW!

Thank you!