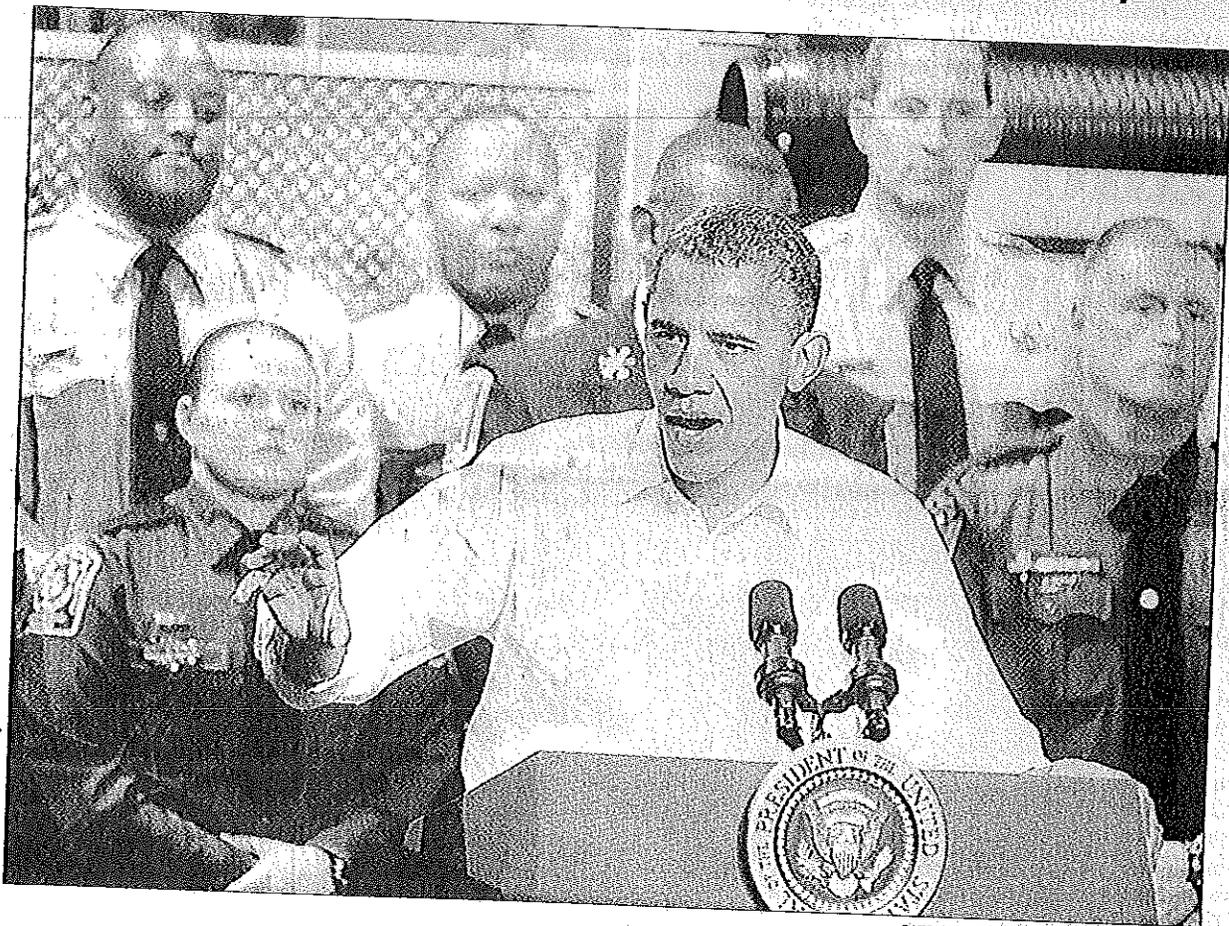


OBAMA VISITS CHESTERFIELD

President stops at firehouse to push jobs plan



Progress Index Oct. 20, 2011

President Barack Obama speaks during a visit with firefighters at Chesterfield Fire Station 9. It was the final stop on his bus tour of North Carolina and Virginia.

PATRICK KANE/PROGRESS-INDEX PHOTOS

BY MARKUS SCHMIDT
STAFF WRITER

CHESTERFIELD — President Barack Obama, speaking before firefighters and local officials at a Chesterfield County firehouse on Wednesday, stressed the importance of funding public safety jobs.

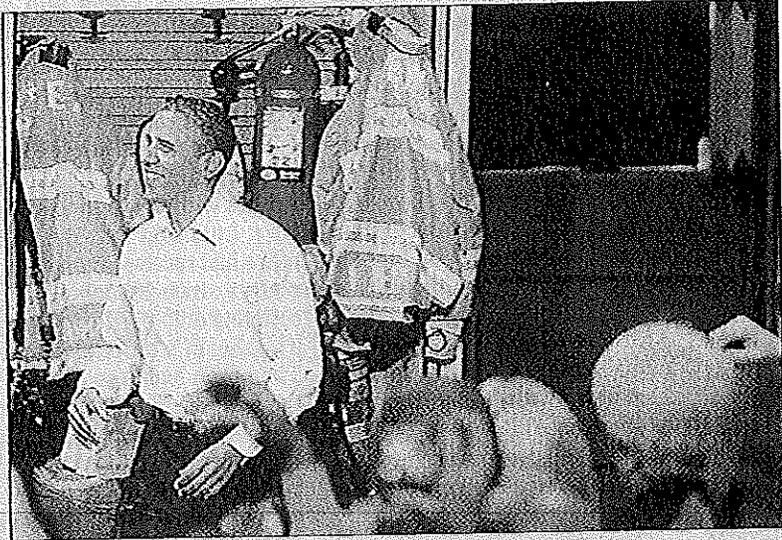
"Keeping first responders on the job — that's a jobs plan," Obama said. "These guys are risking their lives every day on our behalf. These jobs are worth fighting for," he said.

The president's visit at Fire Station 9 off Buford Road in northern Chesterfield came at the end of a three-day bus tour throughout North Carolina and Virginia to promote his jobs bill. Obama received an enthusiastic welcome from roughly 160 invited guests. In his 17-minute speech, Obama said that local governments nationwide are hard pressed by declining state appropriations and ebbing local tax collections.

With more federal cuts looming, Obama said that Republicans in Congress will have to decide whether they can say no to federal aid to help fire departments across the nation avoid layoffs.

Because Senate Republicans had already blocked a vote on his bill, Obama now wants to force votes on

*Please see **OBAMA**, Page A6*



President Barack Obama enters Chesterfield Fire Station 9.

Progress Index Oct. 29, 2011

OBAMA

Continued from Page A1

individual elements of it. "We're going to give them another chance to listen," he said. "We're going to let them vote on each of these ideas separately, and we'll see if they fight just as hard for your jobs as they fight for their own jobs," he told the firefighters.

"The first vote we're going to ask Congress to take this week would put hundreds of thousands of firefighters back on the job, police officers back on the street, teachers back in the classroom," Obama said.

"A fair shot for everybody; a fair share from everybody — that's a principle that built America," Obama said. "That's how we created a middle class. Now, they can do the right thing in Congress and put people back to work right now and reopen firehouses. But I'm going to need your help. I need you, and that's the reason I'm here," he said.

The president noted that so far, Chesterfield had been lucky because it isn't facing layoffs at the moment. "But a lot of these guys have seen their pay frozen," Obama said.

Chesterfield public safety officials have had to cut their budget by 2 percent last year, but nobody lost a job, said Lt. Jason Elmore, a spokesman for Chesterfield Fire and EMS. However, fire officials were forced to cut about five open positions that will not be filled. "Any kind of a cut when you're on a tight budget is going to be a factor," Elmore said.

Obama said that states like Michigan and New Jersey had to lay off big chunks of their forces. "That means that firefighters can't always get to fires before they become major fires. And that makes their job more dangerous," he said.

Obama said that his jobs bill contains the kind of proposals that in the past were supported by Democrats and Republicans alike. "It will not add to our deficit," he said. "It's paid for by asking the wealthiest of us, people



PATRICK KANE/PROGRESS-INDEX PHOTOS

Protesters on Midlothian Turpklike and Buford Road waved flags and signs around to protest President Barack Obama appearance at Chesterfield Fire Station 9.

like me, to be able to put in a little bit more so that we can make sure that folks who are struggling get the help they need, and that the economy overall is improving," he said.

Obama cited independent economists who have said that the bill will create nearly 2 million jobs. "That's not my opinion," he said. "This is the opinion of independent economists. People who study the economy for a living say this would give the economy the jolt that it needs," he said.

Most people understand that the economy and its problems didn't happen overnight, Obama said. "It's going to take time to rebuild the kind of America in which everybody has a fair shot. We're going to keep on fighting, we're going to keep on working to make sure that we've got the kind of economy that works for everybody, and not just some," he said.

Obama said he was seeking a bi-partisan solution to the job problem. "A number of people have been asking during the course of this road trip, why have you been visiting some of the most Republican parts of North Carolina and Virginia? And what I've had to remind them is that I'm not the Democratic President, I'm not the Republican President, I'm the President of the United States of America," Obama said, earning applause from the audience.

"I don't care what party you belong to, we're all

Americans and we're all in this together. And that's why we didn't call this the Democratic jobs plan or the Republican jobs plan, we called it the American Jobs Act," he said.

Obama cited a recent poll showed that 63 percent of the American people support what's in the American Jobs Act. "Unfortunately, we've had 100 percent of Senate Republicans vote against it," he said. "[But] a majority think it's a good idea to keep firefighters on the job."

Obama criticized the Republicans own proposal for job creation. "The primary ideas in their jobs plan is to roll back regulations that keep our air and water clean and to go back to the system we had in Wall Street that caused this crisis in the first place," he said, earning applause.

"Their plan says that if we roll back health care reform, that somehow jobs are going to be created," he said. "Dirtier air, dirtier water, fewer people on health care, less accountability on Wall Street — that is not a jobs plan," Obama concluded.

In spite of bad news about the economy, the job market has seen private sector growth in the past 19 months, Obama said. "We've seen more than 2 million jobs created in the private sector," he said.

The problem — state and local governments have been very hard pressed, forcing them to cut back on firefighters, police officers and teach-

ers, Obama said. "And that's one of the biggest challenges we have," he said. "Not only because these folks sacrifice for us and provide extraordinary service to us, but also they go to restaurants and they go to the hardware store and they pay a mortgage. If we've got firefighters or police officers or teachers who are being laid off, that hurts the small business person down the street. That means that somebody may have their home foreclosed on, and that brings property values down for everybody," he said.

Obama said that the provisions in his bill are ones that most people support — keeping firefighters, police force and teachers on the job, giving tax cuts to families, small businesses and to businesses that hire veterans.

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