

Volkswagen inaugurates new plant at Chattanooga/U.S.
Speech of Ray LaHood, U.S. Secretary of Transportation

Thank you very much!

I am delighted to be here.

I know that that our friends at Volkswagen had wanted President Obama to come, but he is on a different kind of a trip right now, and I know that he would have been here, had he not been out of the country.

Before I begin my former remarks, I want to say a word about two extraordinary people, who had the foresight in other public service jobs and in other public service lives, to know how important it was to dream about what we are doing here today - inaugurating Volkswagen here in Chattanooga

These two individuals are both United States senators: Lamar Alexander was governor of Tennessee, when he started dreaming about this kind of opportunity for the citizens and the jobs that it would provide, and Bob Corker was the mayor of Chattanooga.

Two very, very forward thinking public servants.

I just want to say to both of them: Thank you for your vision for this part of the United States, thank you for the vision that you had for your citizens.

I don't think that we would be here today if it weren't for that kind of vision that each of you held during the time you were in public office.

And to you, Mr. Ambassador – thank you so much for joining us and being a part of this!

And to all of you: Thank you for the warm welcome!

To the current governor, the past governor: Obviously, your vision has held firm and been a great way to really carry this off and make it happen and fulfill the dreams that others have had.

This is a great day for Volkswagen!

And for Tennessee!

And for our great country, the United States of America!

I'm thrilled to be a part of the celebration, the work that has happened here could not be more exciting or more important.

It's the touch tone example of what President Obama means when he says that American workers can still outbuilt the competition.

Which is why Volkswagen has decided to put 2000 of American workers to work, manufacturing the cars of the future right here in Chattanooga.

It also represents significant progress towards the solution to one of our nation's most pressing challenges.

During the last few months families have shouldered an enormous burden with the high price of gasoline.

In many places gas is now more than 4 dollars a gallon, meaning that you could be paying more than 60 to 75 dollars to fill up your tank.

Clearly, our transition to a more economically and environmentally sustainable economy won't happen over night - but there is little doubt that we're meeting a time of transition for the automobile industry.

For a century, Americans planned and paid a transportation system that reflected a single, unquestioned assumption: the belief that the world supply of cheap oil was endless.

Today, we know that it is not true!

Families pay more for transportation than for food, education, health care or anything else in the household budget besides housing

Other imperatives like responsible stewardship of our air and climate are on Americans minds like never before.

But because of Pres. Obama's leadership and your hard work, we're on to a smarter plan: a smarter plan forward.

We're on the verge of a new kind of transportation system for a new century - and clean diesel must be a part of it!

Not just because it is the right thing for America, but because it makes economic sense for American families, their budgets, and also American business.

Now the technology you're putting into Passats here can really make a difference!

I know these cars can get between forty to fifty miles per gallon returning between 700 and 800 miles on a single tank of gas, they also emit 30 percent less carbon pollution while helping to reduce America's dependence on foreign oil.

We know that clean diesel is one ingredient in the recipe for our long-term energy security!

If one third of all US vehicles were clean diesel we would save 1.4 Million barrels of oil a day - that's the same amount of oil America imports from Saudi Arabia.

So today is a big deal!

This is a big deal!

And of course, the other great success story under way is about the jobs.

These cars will be built with 85 percent North American parts - and that doesn't just translate into 2000 direct jobs here, it also translates into 9,500 indirect jobs across Tennessee.

It sets off a powerful ripple effect as suppliers start buying new goods and hiring new employees, as workers start spending more money and their families start shopping or going

out to eat again, as small businesses start purchasing more inventory and hiring additional staff.

So my message is this:

This is where our economy is rebounding.

And where our workers are regaining their footing.

And when companies like Volkswagen – a great company – harness the resilient entrepreneurial spirit, we can build a 21st century transportation system that uses less petroleum, sends few of our hard earned dollars overseas while also spearheading economic development, opportunity, competitiveness, and most important: jobs for Americans.

I want to congratulate Volkswagen!

Volkswagen has had a long rich tradition in America.

Americans love Volkswagen, and now even more!

The opportunity to buy a Volkswagen made in America, made in Chattanooga, will launch a whole new era for this company and for America!

Thank you Volkswagen for being in America!

****Applaus****