

Written by Kathy
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CLEVELAND, Ohio-President Barack Obama (pictured) spoke to an intimate group of some 500 members of the City Club of Cleveland and their guests and about a half dozen elected officials at the Convention Center in downtown Cleveland, Ohio on Wednesday afternoon.

The turnout was the Democratic who's who of greater Cleveland.

Cleveland Urban News.Com, Ohio's most read digital Black newspaper, was among a host of media outlets there to cover the event, one in which the 500 available free tickets were swept up in under an hour, City Club organizers said.

The president recognized U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, a Cleveland Democrat, U.S. Reps. Marcia L. Fudge and Marcy Kaptur, both also of Ohio, and Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson before delivering remarks, a 35-minute speech that focused on manufacturing, and what the president dubs middle class economics.

America's first Black president, and a Democrat, Obama also touched on research, education,

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infrastructure, job growth, Obamacare, voting rights, and the racial unrest around the country relative to arbitrary police killings of unarmed Black men and boys.

"The United States of America is coming back," said Obama, 53, who is currently serving the third year of a second four-year term. "Factories are opening their doors for the first time in two decades."

Obama said that America has more job openings since 2001, that nationwide unemployment has decreased from 10 percent when he took office in 2009 to a rate of 5.5 percent today, and that the ranks of the uninsured have been cut by a third due to Obamacare, his healthcare initiative that is now federal law. And he said that trickle-down economics does not work, that middle class economics does work, and that "the Republicans have been working hard to re-position rhetoric on the economy."

Manufacturing jobs, said Obama, have risen with his economic plan. And the federal deficit, he said, has been cut by two-thirds.

An advocate of free community college tuition, the president said that community colleges need to be linked to high schools and the business community as an effort to enhance educational outcomes.

Obama responded during the question and answer session of the program and said, indirectly, and as to a particular question, that he is well aware of the racial unrest regarding high profile police killings of Black men and boys. They include Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, Eric Garner in New York, and the shooting death late last year of 12-year-old Tamir Rice by an anxious White rookie Cleveland cop.

Things will get better, the president said.

"There is nothing this country cannot do," said Obama. "There is nothing Cleveland cannot do."

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Mayor Jackson, Cleveland's third Black mayor, told Cleveland Urban News.Com that the president's speech was timely, and appropriate.

"I think he did well," said Jackson. "He is great at delivering a message in a way that people can understand."

Cleveland City Councilman Kevin Kelley agreed, and said that Obama has a command of the issues, and is aware of what is happening in local level venues such as Cleveland, a largely Black major American city.

Cleveland, like other big cities, continues to struggle with poverty, unemployment, mediocre public schools, heightened crime, and increased tensions between police and the Black community.

Asked by Cleveland Urban News.Com if the president's visit had anything to do with Cleveland hosting the Republican National Convention next year, Ohio Democratic Party (ODP) Chairman David Pepper said that he did not believe so, but that Cleveland is clearly on the political map, both nationally and internationally.

"Obviously everyone in the world next year is going to be focused on Cleveland," said Pepper.

Former state senator Nina Turner, of Cleveland, now the chairperson of political engagement for the ODP, said that while the Republican National Convention will bring much needed resources to the city, that she is awaiting the public announcement from former secretary of state Hillary Clinton on whether she will make a bid for president in 2016.

Democratic political operatives Lynnie Powell and Kent Whitley said that the president's speech was fabulous, and Cordell Stokes, a son of the late Carl B. Stokes, a former Cleveland mayor and the first Black mayor of a major American city, called it "historic."

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Retired 11th congressional district congressman Louis Stokes, Carl Stokes' brother and only sibling, and the first Black congressperson from Ohio, told Cleveland Urban News.Com that the country, and the Black community "are blessed to have such a gifted and concerned president."

Other who's who at the political forum include Cuyahoga County Executive Armond Budish, former congressman John Boccieri, Cleveland City Hall Executive Assistant Valerie McCall, Pulitzer prize winning journalist Connie Schultz, who is married to Sen. Brown, Olivet Institutional Baptist Church senior pastor the Rev. Dr. Jawanza Karriem Colvin, the Rev. Dr. Otis Moss Jr. and his wife Edwina, Cleveland NAACP Executive Board Member Meryl Tobert Johnson, Charles E. Bibb Sr., and Key Bank Executive Vice President Margo Copeland.

Other U.S. presidents that have addressed the City Club include Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush in 2006.

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