

# The Washington Post

## Obama blasts 'irresponsible' GOP policies

By William Branigin

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With the [midterm elections](#) approaching, [President Obama](#) lashed out Monday at what he called the "irresponsible policies" of Republican leaders and said he welcomes a national debate over their proposals.

In an interview on NBC's "Today" show, Obama took aim at the "Pledge to America" put forward by House Republican leaders last week, questioning the seriousness of the proposals.

Toward the end of the [interview](#), which was largely devoted to education issues, Obama was asked whether he plans to push back against [the GOP](#) in the coming weeks, especially in view of some Democrats' recent criticism that he has not been rigorous enough in countering Republican attacks.

He said he has "very sharp differences" with the Republican leadership "on a lot of issues," although some [GOP](#) critics and independents recognize that "we've got to be serious" and must base decisions on facts in addressing major national problems.

"What I'm seeing out of the Republican leadership over the last several years has been a set of policies that are just irresponsible," Obama told interviewer Matt Lauer. "And we saw in their Pledge to America a similar set of irresponsible policies."

Although the GOP leaders "say they want to balance the budget," Obama said, "they propose \$4 trillion worth of tax cuts and \$16 billion in spending cuts, and then they say we're going to somehow magically balance the budget. That's not a serious approach."

He added: "So the question for voters over the next five weeks is who is putting forward policies that have a chance to move our country forward - so that our schools have improved, so that we have world-class infrastructure, so that we're serious about helping small business, we're serious about getting a handle on our spending - and who is just engaging in rhetoric. And I think that if that debate is taking place over the next five weeks, we are going to do just fine."

In response to a question from a woman who was watching the live interview, Obama acknowledged that his two daughters [could not get the same quality of education](#) from Washington, D.C., public schools that they get from the private school they attend in the District.

Asked about the nation's increasing poverty rate - recently pegged at 14.3 percent, with 44 million Americans living at or below the poverty level - Obama said that "we're still in the midst of the aftereffects" of the worst recession since the Great Depression. The recession, which officially ended more than a year ago, left 8 million

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people unemployed, with many more underemployed, and jobs have been slow to return, Obama noted. He said a bill to help small businesses that he plans to sign Monday should help.

"The single most important anti-poverty program we can initiate is making sure there's enough job growth," he said.

Obama disputed the characterization of the current recovery as a "jobless" one, however, saying that private-sector job growth has increased for eight months in a row. "The problem is we just lost so many jobs . . . that we've got a much bigger hole to fill."

Obama pivoted to a defense of his plan to let tax cuts for wealthy Americans expire as scheduled at the end of the year, arguing that the rich are not likely to spend the proceeds of additional tax cuts and thus spur the economy. What America needs, he said, are tax cuts for middle-class people who are "struggling" and are more likely to spend the money.

"We can't spend \$700 billion on a tax cut that is not going to spur job growth," Obama said, referring to the estimated cost of extending the Bush administration's tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans.

Obama also dismissed the suggestion that he has lost touch with the average person's struggles. Asked about a supporter's comment to him at a town hall meeting a week ago that she was exhausted from defending him, he said there is widespread sentiment that the recovery is "just not happening fast enough."

Obama said, "Everyone feels that frustration right now. I feel it -- acutely." He added that "all I can communicate to the American people is that every single day, the thing that I wake up with and the thing that I go to bed with is the fact that there are too many Americans out there who are . . . still having a tough time in this economy. We are doing everything we can to make sure that they have an opportunity to live out that American dream."

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