

CHAPTER 11

and Specter had led to a watered-down package that wouldn't sufficiently stimulate the economy. Inside the White House, we knew both claims were bunk: We had done everything possible to accommodate reasonable GOP proposals, and the final bill, while not perfect, contained plenty of firepower to spur economic activity. But perceptions mattered, and the early negative framing put us in a hole from which we'd struggle to emerge.

Moreover, having expended so much energy on the Recovery Act, we now had precious little room to maneuver on other pressing items on our agenda. Rahm and my policy teams were already flagging issues that needed immediate attention: the auto industry was teetering on the brink of collapse, millions were still losing their homes to foreclosure, the crisis in banking was far from resolved, and that was to say nothing of non-economic priorities like healthcare reform, immigration, and climate change.

All of this made the Recovery Act feel less like a victory and more like the end of the beginning. There was so much more work to do, not just to pull the country back from the brink, but to rebuild it stronger than before. And already, it was clear that almost every step of the way, we'd be fighting against a relentless tide of obstruction, misinformation, and outright hostility.

Despite these concerns, though, I clung to a fundamental faith in our strategy and in the American people. The Recovery Act was a bold first step toward addressing the immediate crisis while laying the groundwork for a more robust, equitable economy. We had the right team in place, and although the political headwinds were fierce, I believed that results—jobs created, families helped, industries saved—would eventually speak for themselves.

Still, as the Beast rolled towards the airport and I gazed out the window at the passing Rockies, I couldn't shake off a sense of unease. This was only the beginning, and the road ahead was fraught with challenges I could barely begin to imagine. But for better or worse, there was no turning back now. The die was cast, and the fate of my presidency, and potentially the country, rested on what we did next.