



President Barack Obama spoke after touring the Rolls-Royce Crosspointe plant in Prince George County, Va., on Friday. (Mark Wilson/Getty Images)

PRINCE GEORGE, Va. (AP) — President Barack Obama applauded another burst of job growth Friday as proof the economy is rebounding on his watch from a disastrous recession.

Bidding for re-election, Obama warned factory workers and campaign donors that Republicans would offer only the policies “that got us into this mess.”

“I did not run for this office just to get back to where we were. I ran for this office to get us where we needed to be,” Obama told 1,400 people at a rally-style event in a sprawling Rolls-Royce manufacturing plant south of Richmond, Va.

“And I promise you, we will get there.”

The new monthly jobs report — a barometer of the economy and an important factor in the coming presidential race — showed employers created 227,000 jobs in February.

The unemployment rate held steady at 8.3 percent, the result of more Americans looking for work as job growth takes hold month by month.

The President cautioned that too many Americans still long for work.

But on the factory floor here, he said the manufacturer of jet-engine parts was a symbol of what American companies can accomplish.

“When I come to places like this, and I see the work that’s being done, it gives me confidence there are better days ahead,” Obama said.

“The key now is to keep this economic engine churning. We can’t go back to the policies that got us into this mess.”

The jobs report and split loyalties among Republican voters assessing Mitt Romney, Rick Santorum and the rest of the GOP field give Obama’s team renewed confidence that the path he has forged could help him win re-election and rebuild the economy.

But privately, his advisers know that outside factors in the United States and abroad — from high gasoline prices to instability in the Middle East — could still derail his political and economic ambitions in the months leading to the fall election.

Romney, campaigning in Jackson, Miss., seized on a different statistic: The unemployment rate remains above 8 percent.

“This president has not succeeded; this president has failed — and that’s the reason we’re going to get rid of him in 2012,” Romney said.

Obama was headed to Houston for two fund-raisers, stocking up on campaign cash as Republicans appear locked in a primary process that may not be settled for months.

Republican Gov. Robert McDonnell of Virginia, who joined Obama at the factory and has been talked about as a potential vice presidential candidate, told reporters he was heartened by Obama’s recognition of the innovative Virginia plant.

“When the President is right, I’m going to commend him and say he’s doing things right,” he said.

“If he really wants to get Americans back to work, he needs to look at cutting the taxes and the bureaucracy and the regulatory burden on American business,” McDonnell said.

Yet every strong month of hiring undermines arguments from Republicans that Obama has failed to deliver on promises to pull the economy out of recession.

Since the beginning of December, the country has added 734,000 jobs, the strongest three months of pure job growth since the Great Recession.

Obama has highlighted the US economy's addition of 429,000 manufacturing jobs during the past two years, touring factories in Wisconsin, Washington state and North Carolina in recent weeks.

The United States lost 2.2 million manufacturing jobs in the two years before that.

Political calculations are not far from the surface in these trips — Virginia is expected to be a major election battleground later this year, and the president was ending the day with the fund-raisers in Houston.

In Virginia, Obama promoted a \$1 billion plan to create a network of up to 15 regional institutes to create partnerships among private industry, universities and community colleges and government.

He also announced a \$45 million pilot program that would show the type of potential collaboration among academia and industry.

In Texas, Obama was raising campaign cash among supporters who live in a reliably Republican state.

Jimmy Carter, in 1976, was the last Democratic presidential candidate to carry Texas, but changing demographics and an influx in Hispanic voters have given Democrats hopes of competing in the state beyond the 2012 elections.