

Obama Gets Social at Facebook Townhall Meeting

President Obama proved to be a social media sensation in the 2008 elections. Now, he's gearing up to attract new friends before the 2012 campaign begins.

Obama on Wednesday held a Facebook Town Hall meeting at Facebook headquarters in Palo Alto, Calif. The event was occasion enough to get Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg to wear a suit and tie. The first question came from Zuckerberg himself. He asked the president about his thoughts on balancing the budget.

"In the short term, Democrats and Republicans now agree we've got to reduce the debt by about \$4 trillion over the next 10 years. And I know that sounds like a lot of money—it is. But it's doable if we do it in a balanced way," Obama said. "What I proposed was that about \$2 trillion over 10 to 12 years is reduction in spending."

As the town hall meeting proceeded, Obama took questions from people watching Facebook live about the housing crisis, a Facebook employee about job recovery, and several others. Leo Abraham from San Jose, Calif. asked the question whether Obama felt the 2012 budget plan proposed by Paul Ryan, which was praised as bold, demonstrated sufficient boldness.

"The Republican budget that was put forward I would say is fairly radical. I wouldn't call it particularly courageous," Obama said. "I do think Mr. Ryan is sincere. I think he's a patriot. I think he wants to solve a real problem, which is our long-term deficit. But I think that what he and the other Republicans in the House of Representatives also want to do is change our social compact in a pretty fundamental way."

Obama called Ryan's proposal short-sighted because in order to

make his numbers work, cut 70 percent out of our clean energy budget, cut 25 percent out of our education budget, cut transportation budgets by a third.

James Mitchell from Cupertino, Calif. asked about the debt and healthcare. He wanted Obama to talk more about what provisions of the Affordable Health Care Act are designed to slow down the rise of health care costs, and what policies he'd like to see enacted in the future to continue to slow down the rise of health care costs.

Obama explained that he wants to start changing how health care players are reimbursed. He said, "We want to be able to say to a hospital, if you do a really good job reducing infection rates in the hospital, which kill tens of thousands of people across America every year and are a huge cause for readmission rates, and we know that hospitals can drastically reduce those reinfection rates just by simple protocols of how employees are washing their hands and how they're moving from room to room and so forth—there are hospitals who have done it—if we can say to a hospital, you'll get a bonus for that, Medicare will reimburse you for instituting these simple procedures, that saves the whole system money."

At the conclusion of the Facebook Townhall meeting, Zuckerberg presented Obama with a hoodie—the hallmark of his wardrobe. Obama replied, "This is a high-fashion statement right here. This is beautiful."