



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on July 25, 2012

Barack Obama Walks Back “You Didn’t Build That” ... Sort Of

Barack Obama’s reelection campaign tried to walk back the president’s July 13 “You didn’t build that” [remarks](#) about small businesses in America in a series of video statements July 25. Obama had [stated](#) in a July 13 campaign appearance that businesses’ success was due to government rather than individual initiative, saying to small business owners, “Look, if you’ve been successful, you didn’t get there on your own. You didn’t get there on your own.... Somebody else made that happen.”



The Obama campaign’s walk-back on the statement — the original statement has become an [Internet meme](#) — began July 25 with a [video statement](#) by the president:

Those ads taking my words about small business out of context, they are flat-out wrong. Of course Americans build their own businesses. Every day, hard-working people sacrifice to meet a payroll, create jobs, and make our economy run. And what I said was that we need to stand behind them, as America always has, by investing in education and training, roads and bridges, research and technology.

Interestingly enough, Obama and his campaign officials cast his remarks as being out of context rather than an error or misstatement. Deputy Campaign Director Stephanie Cutter released a longer statement July 25 claiming:

Mitt Romney recently launched a new TV ad that blatantly twists President Obama’s words on small business owners and entrepreneurs. Romney’s not telling the truth on what the President said. And is taking the President’s words out of context. Romney claims the President told entrepreneurs they didn’t build their own businesses. Actually, he didn’t say that.

Of course, anyone who has actually seen the [video](#) or read the [transcript](#) of Obama’s remarks knows Obama did say, “If you’ve got a business — you didn’t build that. Somebody else made that happen.” Here’s the [quote in context](#):

They know they didn’t — look, if you’ve been successful, you didn’t get there on your own. You didn’t get there on your own. I’m always struck by people who think, well, it must be because I was just so smart. There are a lot of smart people out there. It must be because I worked harder than everybody else. Let me tell you something — there are a whole bunch of hardworking people out there.

If you were successful, somebody along the line gave you some help. There was a great teacher somewhere in your life. Somebody helped to create this unbelievable American system that we have that allowed you to thrive. Somebody invested in roads and bridges. *If you’ve got a business — you didn’t build that. Somebody else made that happen.* The Internet didn’t get invented on its own. Government research created the Internet so that all the companies could make money off the



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Internet. [Emphasis added.]

The Obama campaign walk-back on the president's July 13 remarks then took the form of claiming that big federal government programs are equally responsible for business successes. In essence, the Obama campaign denied government created business successes, and then [Cutter backtracked again](#) to Obama's original position, stating:

The President said that together, Americans built the free enterprise system that we all benefit from.... He has invested in our roads, bridges and highways, he has doubled Pell grant scholarships and reformed the student loan system to help students afford college, and he is committed to making sure that every community in America is connected to the digital age by expanding broadband access. Ironically, Mitt Romney knows better than anyone that business can't always do it alone.... These attack ads make you wonder. Does [Romney] even understand how our economy works? You and I know how it works. We build our businesses through hard work and initiative, with the public and private sectors working together to create a climate that helps us grow. President Obama knows that, and he's fighting to strengthen our economy on that basic principle.

Cutter's remarks echoed Obama's remarks about small businesses that "we need to stand behind them, as America always has, by investing in education and training, roads and bridges, research and technology." Of course, the federal government has not always subsidized education and technology; these are extra-constitutional innovations of the last 40 years and not among the [enumerated powers](#) of the federal government. And the federal government has a [poor track record](#) of backing technology with tax dollars.

More troubling than the lack of historical and constitutional history is the fact that Obama and Cutter's summary of Obama's economic agenda as "the public and private sectors working together" serves as a succinct [definition of economic fascism](#) and the opposite of [free enterprise](#). Furthermore, Obama seems to be unaware that business owners, through their tax dollars, are actually paying for the "roads" and "bridges" and "education" that they supposedly depend upon. So perhaps the president should be thanking businesses for contributing to the government.

Photo of President Barack Obama: AP Images



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