LIMA - Republican vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan told the nearly 2,000 supporters at the Veterans Memorial Civic and Convention Center in Lima on Monday that Americans “are beginning to give up hope” on the economic recovery.

“People are beginning to give up hope. People are beginning to think that the American Dream’s not for them because of this stagnant economy. And when you take a look at what your government’s doing to you in every nook and cranny of America, it’s not good,” Ryan said during the town hall meeting.

Ryan’s visit to Lima was the first stop on a bus tour across Ohio. Presidential hopeful Mitt Romney’s running mate used President Barack Obama’s plan of deep military cuts and his proposal to shut down the Joint Systems Management Center, an Allen County employer of 800 and the only tank plant in the country, to get the crowd’s attention.

“Look, Lima, I know you understand when you have a president who has proposed again and again to shut down this tank factory — the only one we have — over a budget gimmick,” the Wisconsin lawmaker said. “If we keep doing this, if we keep showing that the only thing we want

to do is gut our military, that projects weakness abroad. And by projecting weakness abroad, our adversaries are so much more tempted to test us, and our allies are so much less willing to trust us."

The White House has proposed suspending tank production because the Pentagon says it will soon have enough tanks. Some members of Congress are attempting to restore funding for the tanks and other military weapons in a defense spending bill, a move the White House has threatened to veto.

The administration says adding more money to the budget will trigger deeper cuts because of an agreement made during a failed congressional attempt last year to reduce the deficit.

Ryan voted for the automatic spending cuts that could trigger large cuts in the nation's defense budget.

Ohio Republicans have been critical of plans affecting the plant and say they won't save the government money.

General Dynamics Corp.'s land systems unit, which operates the government-owned plant, estimates that the cost of shutting down the plant and then restarting it would be $1.6 billion while keeping it open with minimal production over four years would cost $1.4 billion. The Army puts the price of pausing production much lower — around $400 million, the Associated Press has reported.

"We're not going to shut down the only tank plant we have in America. We need peace through strength," Ryan said.

A comment made by Romney was put under the spotlight Monday. Asked by a member of the audience to explain his running mate's "47-percent" remark, Ryan said, "We want an opportunity society, not a welfare state."

He said the Romney administration's measure of success would be not how many people are on food stamps "but how many we get off of them."

In his final push for the afternoon, Ryan said President Obama's statement in an interview on the Univision network last week that he can't change Washington from the inside was revealing.

"That is why you send presidents to Washington - to fix what's broken in Washington. Since he's admitted he can't change Washington, we need to change presidents," Ryan said.

Recent polls in Ohio show Obama with a slight lead over Romney.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.__PUBLIC__