

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser

March 16, 2011

The President. Thank you. Everybody, have a seat. Have a seat. You're making me blush.
[*Laughter*]

Audience member. We love you!

The President. I love you back!

Boy, it is nice to see so many friends in a room. [*Laughter*] I live in Washington, so that doesn't always happen. [*Laughter*] But when you gather up so many folks who helped get me where I am today—I am reminded of that story of Abraham Lincoln when he was President. Back then anybody could have—he had office hours. And he'd let people come in and meet with him. And somebody insisted on coming to see him, barged through the door, said to his personal assistant, "I need to see the President. I'm the one who got him elected." And none of you have done that, of course. [*Laughter*]

So the assistant goes in, mentions this to Lincoln. Lincoln looks at his watch—he's got a little bit of time. He says, "Oh, bring the guy in." He says, "Sir, I understand you're the person responsible for getting me elected." He says, "That's right." He says, "Well, I forgive you." [*Laughter*] So I forgive all of you. [*Laughter*]

I want to acknowledge obviously somebody who has done extraordinary work. This is the person who not only has fought for the things we care about—first as a mayor, then as a Governor, most recently as DNC chair—he's also somebody who was the first elected official to endorse me outside of Illinois when I announced for President of the United States. And he did so in the capital of the old Confederacy, at a time when very few people thought I was going to win. So, clearly, he was term limited. [*Laughter*] But nevertheless, it took a lot of courage. [*Laughter*] And so I just want to say how much I appreciate my dear, dear friend Tim Kaine.

I also just want to say a few things about David Plouffe. Somehow he figured out how to get a 2-year sabbatical after the election, and as a consequence, has earned the enmity of all the rest of my staff, because he's now strolled in all fresh and perky. [*Laughter*] And he's got a smile on his face every day. The rest of us are—got those bags under our eyes. And he's like, "Boy, this is fun!" [*Laughter*]

But not only did he engineer what may have been one of the finest Presidential campaigns in American history, but even in the few months that he has now been in the White House, we've already seen just the enormous focus and energy and wisdom that he brings to the task of trying to make America adapt to the 21st century and be successful for generations to come. And so I'm just so proud to have David Plouffe here, and I want everybody to give him a big round of applause.

Now, as David mentioned, obviously the last 2 years have been extraordinary and historic. And the American people have gone through as tough a time as they have certainly in my lifetime and in the lifetime of most of us here. When we put together the campaign in 2008, we all understood that America was at a turning point. We understood that the wheels of history were turning more and more rapidly, and that the old ways of doing business weren't going to

be sufficient to make us competitive, to make sure that the American Dream lived for the next generation.

And so our campaign was geared towards the notion that there are time-tested values that bind us together as Americans—a belief in hard work and individual initiative and the free market, but also community, looking out for one another, embracing diversity—and that our task was to make sure that we worked hard to seize this moment and make sure that our institutions, our politics, our Government were all working to ensure that these values that date back to our founding would be renewed and live for this generation and the next.

And that meant that we had to make sure that our schools were educating our kids, not only to be outstanding workers and entrepreneurs, but also outstanding citizens. We had to make sure that we rebuilt America so that we could compete in this new century. We had to make sure that we had an energy policy that would not only protect the planet, but also free ourselves from dependence on foreign oil.

We had to make sure that in a nation as wealthy as ours, we were able to deliver a health care program that made sure nobody went bankrupt just because they went sick. We had to make sure that the ideals of equality and justice for all people—regardless of race and religion and sexual orientation—that those were lived out each and every day.

And we haven't finished that task, but we have made extraordinary progress over these last 2 years. It's been tough. There have been times where we had to make some very difficult decisions. And obviously, what we didn't anticipate was the depth of the recession in which we would try to—we would have to try to make some of these changes. But when you look back at the track record of work that we've done over the last 2 years, I think that it's fair to say the promise that we made to the American people has been kept, that we have delivered on change that we can believe in.

But we aren't finished. We've got more work to do. Now obviously, 2012 is coming up, and everybody here is interested in politics and electoral votes and strategy, and I'm sure each one of you have a campaign plan—[laughter]—that you'll be handing off to Messina and Patrick Gaspard before you leave here tonight. And there will be time for campaigning and there will be time for politics. But I guess what I want to really emphasize to all of you today is that I've always been a firm believer that good policy was good politics. And I've always been a good—I've always been a believer that what made 2008 special was we didn't tack to the varying political winds; we didn't make decisions about where we stood on issues simply based on political expediency. Our goal was to make progress for the country.

And I think that the American people sensed that. Even when they disagreed with us, I think they sensed that our real objective here was to make sure that we had a government that was worthy of the decency and goodness of the American people.

And I don't want us ever to lose that spirit. I don't want us ever to look back and say, you know what, we said things that we didn't believe in, or we pursued policies that weren't the best possible policies for the country, just because it made for smart and convenient politics.

Because, ultimately, the one thing about being in this job, in addition to getting a lot of gray hair—[laughter]—in addition to consistently being so proud of all the hard work of people in the White House who make huge sacrifices for their families—or make huge sacrifices to be with their families, because it's such a challenging job, whether they're in the National Security Council or on our economic team—in addition to revering even more the role of our military and keeping America secure, because as Commander in Chief, I have the opportunity to deal

with everybody from the newest private to the highest general, and you constantly are amazed by the sacrifices and extraordinary devotion that our military shows each and every day—the one thing that has consistently been reinforced for me as President of the United States is the basic goodness of the American people.

They're distracted sometimes. They're busy. They're worrying about making sure their kids get to school on time and making sure that their businesses stay open and trying to figure out how to pay the mortgage and worried about high gas prices, and so they're not following every in and out of the debates in Washington. But deep down there is a set of core values and core principles that are good and are right. And when we tap into that, there's nothing that can stop America. When we tap into that, only good things can happen.

And so my job as President, the job of my administration, and your job as my closest supporters, is to constantly find ways that we can tap into that goodness, and constantly find ways that, through our policies and through our—the issues that we promote, that we're bringing people together to solve problems.

Now, David mentioned on health care, that means that over the next couple of years we're going to have to make sure that we implement health care in a way that makes us proud and shows the American people that it's delivering for them and it's providing them relief from the incredible costs of health care.

It means that on energy, despite the progress that we've made, for example, increasing fuel efficiency standards and making sure that we're promoting green energy like never before, that we keep pushing to find ways to free ourselves from dependence on foreign oil and make sure that America is the capital of clean energy for decades to come.

It means that on education, we can't just stop with the incredible work that Arne Duncan's done with Race to the Top; we've got to reform No Child Left Behind to make sure that not only is no child left behind, but every child gets ahead. And that means that we're going to have to—[*applause*]. That means we're going to have to work hard this year and the next to try to forge a bipartisan consensus on how we recruit incredible new teachers and get them in the classroom and reinvigorate our schools across the country and make sure that higher education continues to be affordable.

It means on infrastructure we've got a lot of work to do. We've got a lot of crumbling roads and bridges and high-speed rail to build, and broadband lines to lay, that can put hundreds of thousands of people all across America to work and make sure that we're laying the foundation for long-term economic growth.

It means that we're going to have to work on the deficit in a serious way, not to score political points, not trying to take an expedient way out of what are going to be some very tough decisions, but rather embracing those tough decisions and saying there's a way that our Government can live within its means, even as we're investing in those things that we need to win the future.

We've made incredible progress when it comes to issues like "don't ask, don't tell," but we're still going to have work to do to make sure that this is a more equal and more just society. We've still got work to do on immigration reform. We've got a system that is broken right now, and as tough as that issue is, I am confident that we can be a nation of law and a nation of immigrants.

And then we've got foreign policy. We're at a moment in time where obviously all of us are heartbroken by the images of what's happening in Japan, and we're reminded of how American leadership is critical to our closest allies. Even if those allies are themselves economically advanced and powerful, there are moments where they need our help, and we're bound together by a common humanity.

But we also have the convulsions in the Middle East that offer the prospect of incredible change and offer enormous opportunities so that our children could live in a more peaceful world. But we're going to have to take advantage of them. We've ended combat operations in Iraq, but we've still got a lot of work to do to bring the Afghan war to an honorable end in a way that is safe and secure. And we're going to have to continue to be vigilant on dealing with terrorism even as we are protective of our civil liberties.

So we've got enormous challenges ahead. And the one thing, I guess, I want to say to all of you is that as tough as these times have been, what's amazing is the resilience that the American people have shown through as tumultuous a time as I remember in my lifetime. That's part of America as well, not only their goodness, but also their strength and their resilience.

And that's what we want to represent when we're out there talking to our friends and neighbors and our coworkers. As 2012 unfolds, I expect that we're going to have a lot of questions and there are going to be vigorous debates, but I don't want us to lose sight of the huge opportunities we have to seize the moment and make sure that America is not just changed, but is changed for the better.

There are times where Michelle reminds me that I volunteered for this job—[laughter]—because she looks at me and I looked tired. But I'm telling you, I am having an extraordinary time, because there aren't many moments in our lives where we know that we're making a difference. And this is one of those moments.

Everybody here is incredibly accomplished. Everybody here has achieved in their respective fields extraordinary things. I know many of your families, and you've got beautiful kids that you couldn't be prouder of—so all of us have things that we're proud of. But I tell you what, this is something that is a truly worthy endeavor, trying to make this country as good as it can be.

And so the main message I have for all of you is thank you. I appreciate all the hard work that you put in to help me become President. I appreciate your counsel. I appreciate your advice. I appreciate the fact that you're rooting for me and some of you are praying for me and some of you make me laugh when I see you and give me encouragement. And, yes, I appreciate all the excellent policy advice that you give me as well. [Laughter]

And my hope is that the same spirit that helped change this country in 2008, that that spirit is still in each and every one of you. Obviously, the first time around it's like lightning in a bottle. There's something special about it, because you're defying the odds. And as time passes, you start taking it for granted that a guy named Barack Hussein Obama is President of the United States. [Laughter] It's not—[applause]—but we should never take it for granted. And I hope that over the next couple of years, as we're seeing a lot of you as I travel around the country, I hope that all of you still feel that sense of excitement and that sense of possibility, because we still have so much more to do.

Last point I'm actually going to make is I hope that as we go forward, even though the politics in this country can be tough—and I'm sure that some of you are like Michelle and at

some point had to just stop watching cable TV because it was getting too frustrating—I also want you to remember that as important as our political labels are—Democrat and Republican—as many tough fights as we're going to have, part of what made 2008 special is we brought the country together, reminding everybody that there's a lot more that we have in common than separates us, and that the contest between Democrats and Republicans is much less important than the contest to make America what it can be.

I know that sometimes people may get frustrated and think, "You know what, Obama is being too nice and we need to get in there and take it to them." [*Laughter*] And there will be times where that's important. But I also think it's important for us not to lose that spirit that animated us early on, which was to say that we don't want to just fight the same old battles over and over again. It's important for us to make sure that we are actually doing the work of changing our politics even as we are changing our policies.

And that's tough. It makes our job a little bit harder sometimes. But I think it's absolutely important if we're going to achieve our goals.

So, thank you, everybody. God bless you. I'm proud of you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5 p.m. at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to White House Senior Adviser David Plouffe, who introduced the President; and White House Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations James A. Messina.

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