

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser in Chicago, Illinois
April 14, 2011

The President. Hello, Chicago! It is good to be back in Chicago! It's good to be back at Navy Pier. And I didn't have to pay for parking. *[Laughter]*

I remember driving around that parking lot—*[laughter]*—taking Malia and Sasha to the Children's Museum. Can't find a spot. *[Laughter]* You keep on going up, around and around and around. *[Laughter]* It's a lot smoother these days.

Audience member. We love you!

The President. Love you back.

Everybody is a special guest, but we've got some super, super special guests. First of all, we've got in the house "Mr. Cub"—Ernie Banks is here. Second of all, we've got a former Bull who doesn't look like he's aged at all—*[laughter]*—still has that baby face—B.J. Armstrong is in the house.

I want to thank Colbie Caillat for performing tonight. And she's going to be at the White House Easter egg roll. That's big. *[Laughter]* You know you're big-time. *[Laughter]* Justin Bieber was just there.

Although I have to confess, this is very—this is a little side note. The White House Christmas party—or "Christmas in Washington" event—was going on and Usher was there and there were a bunch of performers. And there was this little guy who really sang well, great entertainer. And I was sort of acknowledging all the crowd, and I said, "And give it up for Justin 'Biber'." *[Laughter]* I didn't know him at the time. And everybody yelled, "It's 'Bieber'." And Malia and Sasha were mortified—*[laughter]*—when they heard that I had mispronounced his name. Anyway, that's an aside.

Rashard Mendenhall is in the house, Chicagoan and Pittsburgh Steeler.

Now, in addition, before I begin, I want to pay tribute to a friend who has recently taken over this town. He's become the most powerful man in Chicago. Unbelievable energy, sharp elbows—*[laughter]*—but has brought Chicagoans a new sense of hope about our future. Give it up for Derrick Rose.

Audience members. MVP! MVP! MVP!

The President. MVP! MVP! MVP!

I suppose Rahm is doing a pretty good job too. *[Laughter]*

And as good as Derrick is, the Bulls would not be where they need to be if it were not for—Mr. Joakim Noah is in the house. And his mom is there, and I love his mom too. She's wonderful. Yes, it's mom, you know, come on. *[Laughter]*

Now, even as we are all excited about what the future holds for Chicago under its new mayor, we also owe Rahm's predecessor, my Chief of Staff's big brother, a huge debt of gratitude for taking a city that was already a great American city and turning it into a great world city, healing some of the divisions in this city. We are grateful for Richard Daley. Give it up for Richard Daley.

But I can tell you that—I like to tease Rahm, I joke about him—this is a guy who stepped in, in one of the toughest jobs in Washington, if not the toughest job, and stood by my side every step of the way. And I have seen how he performs under pressure. I have seen the kind of commitment that he has to the American people. You guys made a good choice. He is going to be a great mayor, and I am proud to call Rahm Emanuel my friend.

So I look around the room, and as crowded as it is, I just see friends everywhere, people I've been knowing for a long, long time. It's good to be home. It is good to be home.

This is the city where I fell in love and started a family. This is the city where I got my start in politics 25 years ago, working with churches on the South Side to bring jobs to the jobless and hope to the hopeless. It's where I stood with so many of you in Grant Park almost 2½ years ago, when we showed the world that all things are possible in the United States of America.

And some of you may have heard, this is where we're going to be basing our headquarters for the 2012 campaign, right here, back home in Chicago.

Now, this is the first time in modern history that a sitting President has based their reelection campaign outside of Washington. But I decided I don't want our campaign to be just hearing all the pundits and the powerbrokers. I want our campaign to be here because you guys are the ones who got me started. I see people in this audience who supported me when nobody could pronounce my name. [*Laughter*] I see folks who supported me when I ran for Congress and got a beat-down—[*laughter*—and then helped to nurse me back to health.

One of the things that I've seen again and again over the last couple of years is, the conversation in Washington is very different from the conversation around kitchen tables and office coolers. And I wanted to make sure that our campaign was rooted in your hopes and rooted in your dreams. I want to make sure we're putting the campaign in your hands, in the same hands, the same organizers, the same volunteers who proved the last time that together, ordinary folks can do extraordinary things. That's what this campaign is about.

Now, we're all a bit older. [*Laughter*] Some of us are a little bit grayer.

Audience member. Oh, yeah. But you look good! [*Laughter*]

The President. I'll let Michelle know you said that. [*Laughter*]

But all of us can remember that night in Grant Park, the excitement in the streets, the sense of hope, the sense of possibility. And yet, even as we celebrated, you remember what I said back then. I said our work wasn't ending, our work was just beginning. Because while it was clear that I was going to have a full plate going into election day, I'd be lying if I said that I knew how a plate—how full that plate would be. [*Laughter*] It's been a little fuller than we imagined.

We took office in the middle of the worst recession in our lifetimes, one that left millions of Americans without jobs, had folks losing their homes, a recession so bad that many families are still grappling with the aftershocks, even though the economy is growing again.

But the economy is growing again. We're creating jobs again. Over the last 4 months, we've seen the largest drop in unemployment since 1984. Over the last 13 months, we've added nearly 2 million private sector jobs. That didn't happen by accident. It happened because we made some tough choices, like saving the American auto industry.

You remember they said it couldn't be done. There were some folks who were going to write it off, but it was the right thing to do. And now GM is hiring back every single worker they laid off, and every one of the Big Three American automakers are making a profit once again. That's because of the tough choices we made, because of the work that you did getting me into office.

So make no mistake, because of you, we've been able to make real progress over the last few years. Because of you, we were able to prevent another great depression. Because of you, we're making the most meaningful education reforms in a generation through a competition called Race to the Top, raising teachers up and raising learning standards in schools and States across America.

Because of you, we overcame the status quo and reformed Wall Street, making sure that we've got some of the toughest consumer protections so you won't get cheated when you apply for a mortgage or when you take out a credit card.

Because of you, we did what we've been trying to do for almost a century and we made sure that everybody in this society of ours, if you get sick, you don't have to go bankrupt. If you get sick, you don't have to mortgage your house. If your child has a preexisting condition, they're still going to be cared for because we passed health care reform that provided coverage for 30 million Americans. Because of you, we were able to rein in the worst abuses of the health care industry. Because of you, not here in the United States of America are we going to have people who are on the streets because they get sick.

Now, along the way, we did a few other things. We signed into law the Lilly Ledbetter bill, a very simple idea that women need to get paid the same as men for the same kind of work. We finally overturned the injustice of "don't ask, don't tell," and we said that everybody can serve their country. They don't have to lie to serve the country that they love. We put two women on the Supreme Court, including the first Latina Justice.

We brought back a hundred thousand troops from Iraq and ended our combat mission there because we knew that it was time.

And along the way, we had to deal with pirates. [*Laughter*] Who thought we were going to have to deal with pirates? [*Laughter*] That wasn't in my campaign platform. [*Laughter*] Pandemic, earthquakes. Now——

Audience member. Oil spill.

The President. Oil spill. Don't forget oil spills. Golly. [*Laughter*]

Now, part of the hopefulness and the anticipation we all felt that night in Grant Park was also about what we could do to secure and restore America's standing in the world. So that's why we strengthened our alliances. We signed historic arms control agreements, secured loose nuclear materials. That's why we're on the right side of history now throughout the Middle East, because we believe in preventing innocents from getting slaughtered, and we believe in human rights for all people.

That's why we've taken the fight to Al Qaida. That's why we're still working in Iraq to make sure that that transitions to a peaceful democracy. That's why we're taking care of those veterans when they come home because that is a sacred obligation that we have.

So here's the point, Chicago. We have faced an extraordinary array of challenges at home and around the world, but we wouldn't have made any of this progress if it hadn't been for you.

I was talking to a group earlier, and I said, you know, I grew up here in Chicago. I wasn't born here. [*Laughter*] Just want to be clear. I was born in Hawaii. [*Laughter*] But I became a man here in Chicago. And a lot of the people who are here today—the values, the ideals, my beliefs, my core convictions about what makes America great were forged here.

Because it's here, in this incredibly diverse city, that people from every background, every creed, every color, from farm towns and inner-city neighborhoods that somehow come together, immigrants from all around the world—it is here that I was reminded about why America's so great.

It's not the size of our skyscrapers. It's not the size of our GDP. It's the fact that we're able to keep two ideas together at the same time: One, that we're all individuals endowed with certain inalienable rights and liberties and we're self-reliant and we're entrepreneurs and we don't want folks telling us what to do. That's part of—being an individual is so important to us. But we also have this idea that we're all in this together; that we look out for one another; that I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper; that I want to make sure that child on the South Side or the West Side or out in Maywood or out in Dolton, that they've got the same opportunities that I've had; and that I'm looking after them not out of charity, but because my life is richer, my life is better when the people around me are happy and the people around me have a shot at the American Dream.

And those values that all of you helped to form in me, I carried those with me to the White House. I wake up every day with them, and I go to bed every night with them. I'm thinking about you.

And when I read those letters every night from constituents all across the country and they talk about what it's like to send out 16 resumes and not get an answer back; and the desperation that a parent feels thinking they might not be able to take care of their kids; or a child writing a letter saying their parents are losing their home and they're going to have to move, and, "Mr. President, is there something that you can do?"—when I'm thinking about those things, I'm also thinking back here, thinking back home, about what you've taught me.

See, that campaign in 2008, it wasn't my campaign, it was your campaign. It was about your best instincts, your best impulses, your vision for an America that is more fair and more just and more equal and has opportunity for everybody, regardless of color, regardless of race, regardless of creed, regardless of religion, regardless of sexual orientation.

If you hadn't knocked on all those doors, if you hadn't called up all your friends back in 2008, I wouldn't be here. But you know what, we didn't come here tonight just to go down memory lane. We didn't come here tonight just to pat ourselves on the back. We came here tonight because we know that for all the progress we've made, we've still got business to do. We are not finished. And the only way we're going to finish is the same way we began this journey, and that is together.

We're going to have to keep on working. Together, we've got to make sure any American who's looking for work can find a job that pays the bills. Together, we've got to make sure that hard-working families that are doing everything right aren't falling behind, but getting ahead. We've got to reclaim the American Dream for all Americans.

That's the change we still believe in. That's what I think about every single day. That's our north star. That's our destination. And we're not there yet. With your help, we can keep American on track, though.

With your help, we'll attract new jobs and new businesses to our shores. We'll make sure America isn't just competing, but we're competing to win in this economy. With your help, we're going to make sure all our kids are ready for college, all our kids are ready for careers. Because a world-class education is the single most important factor in whether America succeeds in the 21st century.

With your help, we can rebuild our crumbling infrastructure, not just our roads and our bridges, but our high-speed rail lines and our communications networks. With your help, we can continue to invest in cutting-edge medical research and breakthrough technologies and finally have an energy policy that makes sure that our entire economy isn't subject to 4 or 5 dollar-a-gallon gas, reduce our dependence on foreign oil, and clean up the planet in the process so we can bequeath to our children and our grandchildren the kind of planet that we inherited. With your help, we can out-educate and out-innovate and out-compete the rest of the world.

And we can only do all this, by the way, if we get our fiscal issues under control. I gave a speech about this yesterday. When I was running for President, I talked about a new era of responsibility in this country. And part of that means restoring some common sense about our Federal finances, restoring fiscal discipline in Washington, living within our means.

Last week, we were able to prevent a Government shutdown. And the reason we were able to do it was because we agreed to spending cuts, but we insisted on protecting investments in things like education and medical research. But now we've got to rein in this long-term deficit and deal with this long-term debt because it threatens our financial stability. We won't be able to do all those good things if we don't get our fiscal house in order.

But if we don't deal with these issues, all the issues we care about, we're not going to be able to solve. Educating our kids, caring for our sick, looking after our seniors and our poor—all of that will be threatened. So yesterday I tried to lay out a vision for how we tackle this problem. We need to build on the compromises we made last week, but we can't compromise on our investments to grow, the investments we need to create jobs.

We've got to reform defense spending. We've got to reform health care spending. But we're not going to sacrifice our fundamental commitment that we made to one another through Medicare and Medicaid and Social Security, the safety net for our people.

And we need to bring some balance to our Tax Code. Back in December, I agreed to extend the tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans, as much as I disliked it, because it was the only way to prevent a tax hike on the middle class. But the fact is, we can't afford \$1 trillion of tax cuts for folks like me. Not now. Not now, not when so many other Americans are struggling, not when our deficits are so high.

I think Americans like Michelle and me, we've been blessed. This country has given so much to us. We can afford to do a little bit more to make sure that every child in this country has opportunity and every senior is looked after. I think that's something that we can do.

That's our vision for America. We've got a big vision for America, of a compassionate America and a caring America and an ambitious America, not a small America. It's a vision where we're living within our means, but we're still investing in our future; where everyone makes sacrifices, no one bears all the burden; where we live up to the idea that no matter who we are or what we look like, no matter whether our ancestors landed on Ellis Island or came here on slave ships or across the Rio Grande, we are connected to one another; that I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper. In this country, we rise and fall together.

That's the idea at the heart of America. That's why we're going to keep on fighting for immigration reform, because we can't have a nation that forgets its immigrant roots. We can have a nation that is a nation of laws, but also a nation of immigrants.

This idea of bringing everyone together and making sure that everybody's contributing, everybody's responsible, but everybody also looks out for one another, that's the idea at the heart of our last campaign. That's the idea at the heart of this campaign. That's the idea at the heart of America.

This is not my campaign, this is your campaign. And I've got to tell you, there's going to come a time when I'll fully engage in this race. When the time comes, I will be campaigning. [Laughter] I'll be ready to go. But I've got to tell you, right now I still have this day job—[laughter]—

Audience members. You're doing the big stuff.

The President. And that's why I'm going to need your help now more than ever. This campaign is still in its early stages, but now's the time when you can help shape it to make sure it gets out of the gate strong.

We've—let me tell you, I'm grayer, and I'm a little dinged up. [Laughter] I know there are times where some of you have felt frustrated because we've had to compromise with the Republicans on some issues. There have been times—people are frustrated because we didn't get everything done in the first 2 years. There have been times where I felt the same way you do. But you know what, we knew this would not be easy.

We knew that on a journey like this, there are going to be setbacks, there are going to be detours, there are going to be times where you stumble. But we also knew something else. We knew that at each and every juncture in our history, when our future was on the line, when we were on—at a crossroads like we are now, the country came together. We were able to make the changes that we needed.

That's what earlier generations did in Lexington and Concord and Selma and Stonewall. That's what did—so many of you did out in cornfields in Iowa, polling places in Wrigleyville. And that's what I need each and every one of you to remember and do one more time, not for me, but for us, for the future we hold in common, for the better days that lie ahead.

So whenever you hear people say our problems are too big to solve or we can't bring about the changes we seek, I want you to think about all the progress we've already made. I think—I want you to think about all the unfinished business that lies ahead. I want you to be excited about the future that lies before us. And I want to remind you, and I want you to remind everybody else, of those simple words that summed up what we believe as a people: Yes we can.

Thank you. Go Bulls!

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:16 p.m. at the Navy Pier. In his remarks, he referred to Ernest Banks, former shortstop and first baseman, Major League Baseball's Chicago Cubs; Benjamin R. "B.J." Armstrong, Jr., former guard, and Derrick M. Rose, guard, National Basketball Association's Chicago Bulls; Joakim Noah, center, Chicago Bulls, and his mother Cecilia Rodhe; Rashard Mendenhall, running back, National Football League's Pittsburgh Steelers; entertainers Colbie Caillat and Usher Raymond IV; and Supreme Court Associate Justices Elena Kagan and Sonia M. Sotomayor.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Democratic National Committee fundraiser in Chicago, IL.

Locations: Chicago, IL.

Names: Armstrong, Benjamin R. "B.J.," Jr.; Banks, Ernest; Bieber, Justin D.; Caillat, Colbie; Daley, Richard M.; Daley, William M.; Emanuel, Rahm I.; Kagan, Elena; Mendenhall, Rashard; Noah, Joakim; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Raymond, Usher, IV; Rodhe, Cecilia; Rose, Derrick M.; Sotomayor, Sonia M.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, repeal; Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with Russia, expansion; Budget, Federal : Congressional spending restraint; Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Budget, Federal : Government programs, spending reductions; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Improvement; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Strengthening efforts; Civil rights : Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009; Commerce, international : Piracy; Communications : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts; Defense, Department of : Budgetary discipline; Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Economy, national : Financial regulations, modernization efforts; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Standards and school accountability; Education, Department of : Funding; Education, Department of : Race to the Top Fund; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Energy : Gasoline, oil, and natural gas costs; Energy : National energy policy; Foreign policy, U.S. : Diplomatic efforts, expansion; Gulf of Mexico : Deepwater Horizon oil spill :: Environmental effects and cleanup efforts; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Health and medical care : Research and development; Illinois : Democratic Party events; Illinois : President's visit; Immigration and naturalization : American "melting pot"; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Iraq : Democracy efforts; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Judiciary : Supreme Court :: Associate Justice; Middle East : Democracy efforts; Russia : Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with U.S., expansion; Science and technology : Research and development; Social Security and retirement : Social Security program; Sports : Baseball; Sports : Basketball; Sports : Football; Taxation : Tax Code, reform; Taxation : Tax cuts, budgetary effects; Taxation : Tax relief; Terrorism : Al Qaida terrorist group; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts; Veterans : Service and dedication; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Chief of Staff.

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