

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser in San Francisco, California

April 20, 2011

The President. Everybody, have a seat. Thank you so much. It's good to be back in San Francisco.

Part of the reason is because I've got some great friends here. And a couple people I want to acknowledge: Somebody who is one of the greatest Speakers that I know of and is going to be one of the greatest Speakers again, Nancy Pelosi is in the house. The Lieutenant Governor, former mayor, Gavin Newsom is here. An outstanding congressional delegation, Barbara Lee, Mike Honda—where's Mike Honda? John Garamendi is here. Jerry McNerney is here. State Controller John Chiang is here, and State Treasurer Bill Lockyer is here.

And you're here. [*Applause*] I see you. Thank you.

It is nice to be back West, in the great State of California. And let me just say this. Obviously, there are extraordinary responsibilities to this job. There are certain pleasures as well. And coming in on Marine One and then just coming right past the Golden Gate Bridge, that's a pretty nice perk. I've got to say, one of the greatest views in the world.

I had come in from a town hall meeting hosted by Facebook. And I was happy to find out that my Facebook page was doing pretty well. We had—[*laughter*]—I've got 19 million friends, which only puts me half a million friends behind SpongeBob SquarePants. [*Laughter*] So that's something to aspire to, keeping up with SpongeBob.

Audience member. We love you!

The President. I love you back. I do.

It's especially nice to be out of Washington, DC. There are wonderful folks doing great work in Washington, but I have to say that the conversation you hear in Washington is just different from the conversation you hear around kitchen tables or around office coolers. And that's why we decided that our reelection campaign will be the first one in modern history to be based outside of Washington, DC. We're going back to Chicago.

We're going back to Chicago because I don't want our campaign only hearing from pundits and power brokers and the cable chatter. I want our campaign to be hearing from the people who got us here. I want to make sure we're putting the campaign back in your hands, the hands of the same organizers and volunteers that proved the last time that together ordinary people can do extraordinary things. When we're together there is nothing we can't do, including elect a guy named Barack Obama to the highest office in the land.

Now, a few things have changed since the last time around. I'm older. [*Laughter*] I am grayer. [*Laughter*] But my memory has not gone, and so I can still remember that night in Grant Park, when there was so much excitement in the streets and that sense of hope and possibility. And I know you remember not only the good feeling, but also what I said on that night. I said that our work wasn't ending, it was just beginning. I said that our climb was going to be steep. We had so many challenges ahead of us. And I have to say that, at the time, I cautioned people. I said, we may not get there in 1 year; we may not even get there in one term. But if we came together, if we showed the same fortitude and persistence and optimism

that had gotten us to election night, then we could bring about the change that we had talked about, the change that we had envisioned for our communities, for our kids, for our grandkids; the commitments that we had made to each other.

Because that's what the campaign was about. It was a sense of mutual commitment. The campaign wasn't about me, it was about what all of us imagined our country could be. And it turns out that the climb was even steeper than some of us had anticipated. We took office in the middle of the worst recession in our lifetimes, one that left millions of Americans without jobs, hundreds of thousands of people without homes, folks who kept their jobs or kept their homes struggling to pay the bills. It was a recession that was so bad that many families are still grappling with the aftershocks even to this day.

And we had to make tough decisions right off the bat. We had to immediately move a recovery act through that would ensure that we didn't dip into a depression, that would help States and local governments keep teachers on the job and firefighters on the job and police officers on the job, that would make sure that we cut taxes for Americans so they had a little more money in their pockets to help get through tough times.

Some of the decisions we made were not popular. You remember folks talking about the auto bailout. A lot of folks were skeptical; we should just let the auto industry in America go by the wayside. But 2½ years later, our 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.

And along the way, we did a few other things: the largest investment in clean energy in our history, the largest investment in science and basic research that we had seen in years, the largest investment in our infrastructure since Dwight Eisenhower built the Interstate Highway System.

We passed a law that had eluded folks for a hundred years, finally making sure that every single American in this country won't go bankrupt because they get sick, will be able to get health care coverage, even if they've got a preexisting condition. We moved that forward.

We changed our student loan program so that billions of dollars that were going to big banks are now going directly to students and millions more young people are able to go to college as a consequence.

We put two wise women on the Supreme Court, including the first Latina Supreme Court justice.

And we rolled back "don't ask, don't tell," so that everybody can serve their country regardless of who they love.

And then we dealt with pirates—[laughter]—and a pandemic—you forgot about that—an oil spill. We've been pretty busy. And yet our work is not finished. It is going—

Audience member. Gay marriage.

The President. —our work is not finished. It is going to take more than a couple of years. It is going to take more than one term for us to finish everything that we need to do. And I am reminded, almost every night, when I read letters from people from all across the country talk about what it's like to send out 16 resumes and not get a response back. A child writing, saying their parents are about to lose their home: Mr. President, is there something you can do

to help? It's heartbreaking. There's so much resilience and so much strength out there, and yet still so much that needs to be done.

And so when I think about running for reelection, I don't look backwards. I look forward. I say to myself, what can we do for those Americans out there? That's what I think about when I wake up every morning. That's what I think about when I go to bed at night. And that's what this campaign has to be about: about your jobs, about your families, about your hopes, about your dreams. That's what we're fighting for.

Because of you, we've been able to make great progress over these last few years. But that progress can't make us complacent; it can't make us content. It should remind us that change, yes, is possible, but we've got to finish what we started. We've got to finish what we started.

Because of you, yes, we were able to prevent another depression. But in the next few years, we've got to make sure that the new jobs and industries of our time are created right here in the United States of America. We've got to be prepared to win the future. We've got to be prepared to win the future. And that means making sure we're investing in innovation, education, infrastructure—all those ingredients that can keep our economy dynamic.

Because of you, we've made college more affordable for millions of students. But we're not done, we're not done. We've raised standards for teaching and learning in schools all across the country by launching a competition called Race to the Top. But now we've got to keep that reform going until every child is ready to graduate, every child is ready for college, every child can actually afford to go to college, every child is ready for a career. That's how we'll out-educate and out-compete the rest of the world for the jobs of the future, right here in the United States of America.

Yes, because of you, we've made the largest investments in clean and renewable energy in our history. And those are already creating jobs and new businesses. But high prices—high gas prices are killing folks out there.

Audience member. Killing us!

The President. Killing you. You know, it's rough.

Audience member. It's really rough!

The President. You say, "Just really rough." [*Laughter*]

I admit, Secret Service doesn't let me pump gas now. [*Laughter*] But I remember what it was like filling up. [*Laughter*] And you think about a family that has to drive 50 miles to work. They don't have a choice, that's where their job is. They may not be able to sell their home and move closer. That's not an option for them, especially in this housing market.

It would be nice, if they could buy a hybrid, but they might not have the money, and they're driving that old beater, and it's getting 8 miles a gallon. [*Laughter*] And that's no joke. We gave everybody a tax cut, but a lot of that money gets eaten up by high gas prices.

And so we've got to keep making investments in clean energy. We've got to strive for energy independence in this country. We've got to invest in solar and wind and electric cars, and it's time we stopped giving the oil companies \$4 billion in taxpayer subsidies, take that money and put it into clean energy.

That makes no sense. We've got to change it. Instead of subsidizing yesterday's energy, let's invest in tomorrow's energy. It's good for our security, it will grow our economy, and it will leave our children with a safer and cleaner planet.

Because of all of you, we've put hundreds of thousands of people to work rebuilding our infrastructure. But now we've got to make sure that we're built to compete in the 21st century, not just new roads and new bridges, but high-speed rail and high-speed Internet, a smart grid to make sure that we can move all that clean energy all across the country.

I want to make sure that America is the best place on Earth to do business. And part of that is having a world-class infrastructure. I don't want folks flying around the world and saying, how come our airports aren't as nice as they are in Beijing or Singapore? I don't want people going to Europe and saying, boy, these are really nice trains. How come we don't have trains like this?

That's not the American way. I mean, I hate to be parochial, but I want us to have the best stuff. That's part of what it means to be American. We got nice infrastructure.

Audience member. We've got the best President!

The President. Well—[*applause*]. We got to out-build, we got to out-educate, out-innovate the rest of the world.

Because of you, we finally got health care passed. We said health care should no longer be a privilege in this country. It should be something that's affordable and available for every American. We said, in the United States, you should not go bankrupt when you get sick. But you know, there are folks who want to roll it back before it even has a change to get implemented effectively.

Because of you, we passed Wall Street reform that helps make sure that we don't go through the same kind of crisis that we went through before and you as consumers aren't taken advantage of when it comes to mortgages or credit cards. But you know, there are some folks who want to roll it back.

Because of you, we passed a law that says a woman should get an equal day's pay for an equal day's work. What do you think, Nancy Pelosi? Do you agree with that?

But you all know that there's a lot more that can be done when it comes to enforcement of those laws. Yes, we overturned "don't ask, don't tell," but we still have more work to do to make sure that this country is fully equal and treats everybody with dignity and respect. We've got more work to do. We removed 100,000 troops from Iraq and ended combat missions there like I promised we would. But we've still got more work to do to make ourselves secure and bring our troops home.

We've got to protect the changes that we made, and we've got to make the changes that remain undone. We've got to keep moving forward. We've got to keep working for the America that we believe in, the America we want to leave behind to our kids. And that's what the debate we're having in Washington right now is all about.

There's a lot of talk right now about debt and deficits and budget and spending. What this debate is really about is what kind of future we want, about what kind of country we believe in fundamentally. I believe in an America where government lives within its means. I want a government that is lean and effective and not wasting your money, because you don't have any money to waste, which means we've got to cut some spending in Washington. We've got to cut

domestic spending. We've also got to cut defense spending. We've got to cut—[*applause*]—and we've got to cut spending in our Tax Code. We've got a whole bunch of loopholes in there that we don't need. We've got to eliminate every dime of waste.

And if we want to take responsibility for the debt that we owe, then we've got to make some tough decisions. There are going to be some things that would be nice to have, but we can afford to do without. We all need to share in the sacrifice to get us on a stable financial footing.

And by the way, if you are progressive, you've got to be just as concerned about that as somebody who considers themselves a fiscal conservative, because the fact of the matter is, if money that could be going to Head Start or money that could be going to programs that are putting people back to work, if that money is being wasted, that's not good. That doesn't promote progressive values. We've got to be just as scrupulous in thinking about how Government spends money as anybody else. We've got to be more so.

But let me tell you something, I will not reduce our deficit by sacrificing the things that have always made America great, the things that have made Americans prosper. I won't sacrifice our investments in education. I will not sacrifice those. I won't sacrifice our investments in science and basic research. I won't sacrifice the safety of our highways or our airports. I won't sacrifice our investment in clean energy at a time when our dependence on foreign oil is causing Americans so much pain at the pump. I will not sacrifice America's future. That I will not do.

If we want to reduce our deficit, yes, we need to cut spending. But we need shared sacrifice. And that means ending the tax cuts for the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans in this country; we can afford it.

It's not because we want to punish success. It's because if we're going to ask everybody to sacrifice a little, we can't just tell millionaires and billionaires they don't have to do a thing. Just relax, that's fine. We'll take care of this. [*Laughter*] Go count your money. That's fine. [*Laughter*]

Because some of you bought my book, I fall in this category. [*Laughter*] I'm speaking about myself. I can afford to do a little more, especially when the only way to pay for these tax cuts for the wealthy is to ask seniors to pay thousands of dollars more for health care; or cut children from Head Start; or doing away with health insurance for millions of people on Medicaid, seniors in nursing homes or poor kids or middle-class families who've got an autistic child. That's not a tradeoff I'm willing to make. And that's not a tradeoff most Americans are willing to make, regardless of party. We can do better than that. We are better than that! We are better than that!

The America we know is great, not just because of our skyscrapers or the size of our GDP. It's because we've been able to keep two ideas together at the same time. The first idea is that we are all individuals endowed with certain inalienable rights and liberties, that we are self-reliant, we are entrepreneurs. We don't expect others to do for us what we can do for ourselves, and we don't really like people telling us what to do. [*Laughter*]

But the second idea, just as important, is that we're all in this together, that we look out for one another, that I am my brother's keeper, that I am my sister's keeper, that I want to make sure that a child born in a tough neighborhood has the same opportunities I had. And I do that, I feel that way not out of charity, but because my life is richer, my life is better, when

the people around me have some measure of security and some measure of dignity, and they too have a shot at the American Dream.

That's our vision for America. It's not a vision of a small America. It's a vision of a big America, of a compassionate America, a caring America, an ambitious America. And that's what this campaign is about.

There are those right now who say that this is kind of the end of the line. We've got these deficits, we've got debt, we've gone through this recession, there's international competition. China and India and Brazil, they're all growing faster than we are. And you know what, maybe we've just got to shrink. We've got to shrink everything. We can't afford to do big things. We can't afford to make sure every child gets a shot at college. We can't afford to make sure that we've got the best roads and ports and airports. We can't afford to make sure that every senior knows they've got basic health care available to them when they get older. We can't afford to keep our air and water clean. We can't afford to invest in the arts. We can't afford to maintain our national parks.

That's not a vision of America that I want to pass on to Malia and Sasha. I want a vision of America that is big and bold and ambitious as it has ever been. That's what I'm fighting for, and that's what this campaign has to be about. A vision of a big, generous, compassionate America; a vision where we're living within our means but we're still investing in our future; a vision where we all share sacrifice, nobody bears all the burden, and we all share in opportunity; a vision where we live up to the idea that no matter who you are, no matter where you come from, no matter what you look like, no matter whether your ancestors landed here on Ellis Island or came here on slave ships or came across the Rio Grande, we are all connected. We will rise and fall together.

That's the vision of America that I've got. That's the idea at the heart of America. That's the idea at the heart of our campaign.

And that's why I'm going to need your help, now more than ever.

Audience member. I'm in!

The President. This campaign—you're in. I need you all in.

This campaign is still at its early stages, but now is the time when you can shape it. Now is the time when you can get out of the gate strong. I know there are times where some of you have felt frustrated because we haven't gotten everything done as fast as we wanted. We didn't get everything exactly the way we had planned.

Audience member. Health care.

Audience member. Single payer.

The President. See, there? Case in point, right? All right. See, I knew I'd open up this can of worms. [*Laughter*]

Look, there are times where I felt the same way that you do. This is a big, complicated, messy democracy. Change is not simple. Everybody likes change in the abstract, but change in the concrete is hard. It's tough. It requires work.

Not everybody agrees with us. Not everybody agrees in this auditorium about issues. That's part of what makes this country special, is the nature of our democracy. And so sometimes it can be frustrating. And I know there are times where you're sitting there and

you're thinking, golly, you know, Obama, he's made some compromise with the Republicans on this or that. Or, how come he's—he should have done it this way. Everybody's a political consultant. [Laughter] And if he had just phrased it that way, I'm sure we could have gotten health care done in 2 months. [Laughter] You know who I'm talking about, you. That's right.

And then your friends come, and you say, oh, Obama's changed. He's—I was—I used to be so excited. I still have the poster, but—[laughter]. I know. I know.

Sometimes I get frustrated. There are times where I am just so burdened by the fact that there are still so many folks out there who we haven't—haven't gotten the help that they need. And so I understand how you guys feel. But we knew this wouldn't be easy. We knew that on a journey like this, there were going to be setbacks, there were going to be detours, there were going to be some times where we stumbled.

People act like the campaign was easy. They weren't on the campaign. [Laughter] They all look back: Oh, Obama, he ran such a perfect campaign, it was so smooth. What campaign were you on? [Laughter] This was hard. So we knew that there were going to be setbacks and stumbles.

But here's what keeps me going. At every juncture in our history, when our future was on the line, when we were at a crossroads like we are right now, we pulled through, and we pulled through together. We were able to make the changes that were needed. And it was hard. It was full of debate and sometimes rancor and sometimes worse. That's how this country became more equal. That's how the women's movement started. That's how the civil rights movement started. That's how the union movement started.

At every juncture, there's been resistance and debate and uncertainty, but somehow, we pulled through, together. So whenever you hear people say our problems are too big to solve, whenever you hear people say we've got to shrink back on our dreams, whenever you hear people say we can't bring about the changes that we seek, whenever you hear people say, well, the campaign was this or that, but now governing is somehow different, I just want you to think about all the progress that we've already made.

I want you to think about all the unfinished business we've got ahead of us. I want you to be excited about the future that lies before us. I want to remind you and everybody else of those three simple words that summed up what we believe as a people: Yes we can.

Thank you, everybody. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:52 p.m. in the Nob Hill Masonic Center. In his remarks, he referred to Supreme Court Associate Justices Elena Kagan and Sonia M. Sotomayor. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 21.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Democratic National Committee fundraiser in San Francisco, CA.

Locations: San Francisco, CA.

Names: Chiang, John; Garamendi, John R.; Honda, Michael M.; Kagan, Elena; Lee, Barbara J.; Lockyear, William W.; McNerney, Gerald; Newsom, Gavin C.; Obama, Malia; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Pelosi, Nancy; Sotomayor, Sonia M.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, repeal; Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Budget, Federal : Government programs, spending reductions; Business and

industry : Automobile industry :: Strengthening efforts; Business and industry : Global competitiveness; California : Democratic Party events; California : Lieutenant Governor; California : President's visits; Civil rights : Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009; Commerce, international : Piracy; Communications : Broadband technology; Congress : House of Representatives :: Minority leader; Defense, Department of : Funding; Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Diseases : Global influenza outbreak; Economy, national : Financial regulations, modernization efforts; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, elimination of subsidies to private providers; Education : Standards and school accountability; Education, Department of : Funding; Education, Department of : Race to the Top Fund; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment rate; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: Promotion efforts; Energy : Foreign sources; Energy : Gasoline, oil, and natural gas costs; Energy : Infrastructure and grid improvements; Energy : Oil and gas industry :: Subsidies, elimination; Gulf of Mexico : Deepwater Horizon oil spill :: Environmental effects and cleanup efforts; Health and Human Services, Department of : Head Start programs; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Judiciary : Supreme Court :: Associate Justices; Science and technology : Research and development; Taxation : Tax Code, reform; Taxation : Tax cuts, budgetary effects; Taxation : Tax relief; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts.

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