

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser

May 19, 2011

So first of all, if you want to get something done, you put a woman in charge—*[laughter]*—of the DNC. Debbie is going to do an outstanding job. She has been a leader in Congress on so many different issues. She's got energy, she's got verve, she's got drive. She doesn't take any guff from anybody. *[Laughter]* And she does it all—it's like the story about Ginger Rogers, right? She—although, I don't know—I do think her heels are pretty high. *[Laughter]* She's doing it all backward, in heels, and looking after a couple of kids. *[Laughter]* So we are just so grateful for her to be willing to take on this enormous assignment.

I want to thank John for hosting us. Where did John go? John has been a great friend for a long time, since before people could actually pronounce my name. *[Laughter]* For him to open up his gorgeous house is so appreciated.

And I want to thank all of you for being here. This is like a little reunion, because as I look around the table, I see extraordinary friends from all across the country, from Maine to Florida to California to—and everywhere in between. And so many of you worked so hard for us back in 2008. I would not be in a position to work on all the extraordinary issues and challenges that we face had it not been for your faith in me and your commitment. And so to all of you, I want to say thank you.

Now, I feel a little bit of pressure, because I understand that you heard Michelle speak today. *[Laughter]* And I try not to follow her. *[Laughter]* I was hoping that there would be enough separation so that you would have forgotten how good she was by the time I got here.

But since you all remember, I will not attempt to compete. But let me just say that that night in Grant Park in 2008, I spoke to the American people, I spoke to all the folks who had fought so hard to help me win that election, and I said to all of you, this is not the end, this is just the beginning, and that we were going to have a steep hill to climb to get to where we wanted to be.

Now, we didn't know how steep it was going to be. We didn't realize at the time the full extent and full depths of the recession that we were going to face. We didn't understand the magnitude of job loss, how close the financial system came to breakdown. We had to take a series of swift, bold, and sometimes unpopular steps to make sure that the economy didn't go over a cliff.

And as Debbie mentioned, because of the actions we took, the economy is now recovered; it's growing again. Jobs are being added again. Manufacturing has seen more growth than we've probably seen in a decade. The Big Three automakers are back on their feet, making a profit, making cars that Americans want to buy. And they're all doing it, by the way, under new laws that we created with higher fuel efficiency standards so that we become less dependent on foreign oil.

But keep in mind that our goal was never just to get back to where we were in 2007 and 2008. I ran for President because for too long, the American Dream felt like it was slipping away for too many people.

In the previous decade, wages and incomes had flatlined for too many families. And as a group of strong women here, you understand that so many of the issues that we talk about—whether it's equal pay or health care access and affordability—those are things that directly affect families in profound ways. It makes a difference as to whether people can keep their homes or whether they're going to go bankrupt if they get sick. It makes a difference if they're going to be able to catch an illness fast enough because they've got preventive care.

The quality of our education and the ability to afford to send your kid to college is not a given for a whole bunch of families out there. Making sure that women are being trained in math and science and technology for the jobs of the future, that our daughters are able to compete and that they're getting paid what they're supposed to be getting paid when they get those jobs—those are all things that affect families in profound ways. And we haven't made all the progress that we need to make on those issues. A lot of people are still struggling out there.

And so we still have to implement health care reform. Just getting the law passed is the first step. We still have to make sure that the financial reforms that we put in place are implemented effectively. We've still got to make sure that we're creating jobs and that we are building on the extraordinary education reforms that we've made over the last several years so that all our kids are actually getting the kind of education that they deserve.

We've still got to have an energy policy in this country that makes sense, because not only will it help us deal with rising gas prices, which are uppermost on people's minds, but it's also going to make sure we can provide a planet to our children and our grandchildren that is clean and safe.

We're still going to have to get more competitive than we are right now, investing in basic science and technology, whether it's stem cell research, whether it's making sure that we're winning the race for alternative energy. So the tasks before us are enormous—and those are just the domestic ones. [*Laughter*]

Meanwhile, we've got a whole big world out there that is rapidly transforming itself. And obviously, I gave a speech today talking about how we're going to have to respond to these changes in a meaningful way.

And it's interesting, the speech that I gave today, obviously, headlines were that we stand squarely behind democratic and political reforms in the Middle East and North Africa, that we will continue to pursue a just and equitable peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

But you know what got the biggest applause in the room was when we said part of democratic reform, human rights reform in that region is unleashing the untapped power of half that population, making sure that women's rights—[*applause*].

So we've got a lot of business to do. I'm only going to be able to do it if I've got your support. This is going to be a tough race because the economy is still recovering; a lot of people are still suffering. I'm extraordinarily proud of the record that we've amassed over these last 2½ years. But some of the same underlying anxieties and frustrations, difficulties that middle class families are experiencing out there, they're still feeling. And they expect me and my administration, working with Congress in a bipartisan way whenever possible, that they expect us to deal with it.

And so part of what this campaign is going to be about is not just talking about the past, but also talking about the future. That's also, by the way, what this budget debate is going to be about, which all of you will be paying more and more attention to over the next couple of

months. It really has to do with two different visions of the future. Are we going to continue to make investments that allow us to win that future—making our schools work, rebuilding our infrastructure, investing in science and technology and basic research? Are we going to continue to make sure that senior citizens have the safety net of Social Security and Medicare intact? Are we going to live within our means as a government, but do so in a way that ensures that the burden is shared among all people and not just some? And are we going to continue to have a big and bold and passionate vision about what America can be?

That's what this debate is going to be about. So I'm going to need your help. And I've said to a lot of folks, I know that in the 2½ years since I was elected, my hair has gotten a little grayer. [Laughter] The campaign is not going to feel exactly the same. It's not going to be as fresh and new and trendy. [Laughter] "Oh, I'm supporting Obama"—back in 2008, that was a cool thing. [Laughter] Now, "He's the President. We see him all the time." [Laughter]

But the vision is the same. My enthusiasm for the job is undiminished. My faith in the American people, in their core decency, is where it was. In fact, I think it's a little stronger than it was. And so I'm confident that if we're telling our story not about—not just about what we've done, but more importantly, what remains to be done, that we're going to have 5½ more years to finish the job.

So thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:42 p.m. at the residence of John Phillips. In his remarks, he referred to Rep. Deborah Wasserman Schultz, chair, Democratic National Committee.

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