

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser in Chicago, Illinois
August 3, 2011

The President. Hello, Chicago! Oh, it is good to be with some good friends! This is a warm welcome right here.

Let me first of all say thank you to the extraordinary, extraordinary talent that's on stage. First of all, one of the greatest jazz musicians of our time, Herbie Hancock; OK Go band—give it up; DJ Greg Corner—give it up; the lovely and talented Jennifer Hudson from Chicago; the not as lovely or talented, but—[*laughter*]*—*very determined, very brilliant, very loyal, very tough mayor of the city of Chicago, Rahm Emanuel.

I don't know—you know, I'm watching from Washington, but it looks to me like Rahm's doing a pretty good job. And as far as I can tell, he hasn't cursed in public yet. [*Laughter*] He's come close, he says. [*Laughter*] But what he has done is provided extraordinary energy and extraordinary vision to a job that he has wanted for a long time. And I don't know too many people who love the city of Chicago more than your mayor, and I couldn't be more proud of him, so—[*applause*].

Now, we've got a few more dignitaries in the house. We've got the Governor of the great State of Illinois, Patrick Quinn, in the house. We've got one of the finest Senators in the United States of America, Dick Durbin, in the house. We've got one of the greatest Members of Congress in the country in Jan Schakowsky in the house. We've got the ageless Jesse White, the secretary of state, in the house. A great friend of mine, somebody who I wouldn't have been elected to the United States Senate without him, the former senator of the Illinois State Senate, Emil Jones is here. And I know we've got a lot of other important people—like you—in the house.

Now, it's warm, and it's hot, and you just listened to some good music, and you don't want to have a long political speech. But I just wanted to first of all say I could not have a better early birthday present—

Audience member. I love you!

The President. —than spending tonight with all of you. I love you back.

And it's true that I turn 50 tomorrow, which means that by the time I wake up, I'll have an e-mail from AARP asking me to call President Obama and tell him to protect Medicare. [*Laughter*]

When I look out at this crowd, I think back to that incredible night in November—I'm still trying to figure out how the weather was over 60 degrees in November—in Grant Park back in 2008. And it was the culmination of this incredible journey, this long journey that we took together, a campaign that drew on the hard work and support of all of you and people all across the country, men and women who believed that change was possible. In the face of long odds, in the face of frustrations, in the face of setbacks, you said, we don't have to accept politics as usual, and we can once again have a country that is living up to our finest ideals and our highest aspirations.

And that was a lovely night. But you remember what I told you that night. I said—

Audience member. Yes we can!

The President. —I said, "Yes we can," but I said this would not be easy. I said that wasn't the end of the journey, that was just the beginning. The economy was already hammering families. Decisions that had been deferred for too long in Washington were finally catching up with us. All these problems were gathering all at once. And we knew the road ahead was going to be difficult, that the climb was going to be steep.

I have to admit, I didn't know how steep the climb was going to be. [*Laughter*] Because we didn't realize—we just found out a week ago that the economy that last few months in 2008 was even worse than we had realized. I mean, the economy had contracted by 8 percent. It was the worst economy we had ever seen. The next quarter, before any of our economic policies had a chance to go into place, same kind of thing. We lost 8 million jobs like that, hadn't seen anything like it in most of our lifetimes.

But here's what I knew. You did not elect me President to duck the tough issues. You elected me President to do the tough things, to do the big things, even if it took time.

You elected me to make sure that the economy was working not just for those at the very top, but that we had a broad-based, shared prosperity, from the machinist on the line to the CEO in the boardroom.

And I ran because I believed that our success is defined not by stock prices or corporate profits alone, but by whether ordinary people can find a good job that supports a family, whether they can send their kids to college, whether they can retire with dignity and respect, maybe have a little left over for a ballgame or a vacation, not be bankrupt when they get sick.

So what we did was we took a series of emergency measures that first year to save the economy from collapse. And I promise you not all of them were popular. But we did what we needed to do to start getting the economy growing again. And it has been growing, not as fast as we want, but we got the economy growing instead of contracting because we wanted to help families get back on their feet.

We went in and we said—I didn't sign up to be a CEO of an auto company, but I said I'm not going to let a million jobs, especially here in the Midwest, go away, so we're going to intervene, and we're going to ask in return that the auto companies restructure themselves. And we've now seen for the first time in a very long time all the Big Three automakers making a profit. And making a profit selling small cars and compact cars and doing stuff that a lot of Americans thought couldn't be done anymore.

And we said, even as we're saving the economy, there's some—still some issues out there that haven't been dealt with in a very long time, so we're going to make sure that we've got equal pay for equal work, because I don't want Malia and Sasha getting paid less than anybody for doing a good job.

And we're going to make sure that in this country that we love, that nobody is discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation. We're going to make sure they can serve in our military and protect the country that they love.

And we're going to invest in clean energy, because we're tired of being dependent on foreign oil. So we want wind turbines and electric cars made right here in the United States of America. And we're going to increase our investment in basic research to find cures for cancer and Alzheimer's. And we're going to revamp our education system so it starts working for every child and not just some children.

And yes, we are going to go ahead and make sure that every family in America can find affordable health care and that they are not losing their home or going bankrupt because they get sick. And it was hard, but because of you, we kept on driving and we got it done.

So it's been a long, tough journey. But we have made some incredible strides together.

[At this point, a baby in the audience cried.]

The President. Yes, we have. *[Laughter]* But the thing that we all have to remember is, is that as much good as we've done, precisely because the challenges were so daunting, precisely because we were inheriting so many challenges, that we're not even halfway there yet.

When I said, "Change we can believe in," I didn't say, "Change we can believe in tomorrow." *[Laughter]* Not, "Change we can believe in next week." We knew this was going to take time, because we've got this big, messy, tough democracy. And that's a great thing about America is, is that there are all these contentious ideas that are out there, and we've got to make our case. And we knew that these challenges weren't made overnight and they weren't going to be solved overnight.

And so, as we look forward, we know we've still got a lot of work to do on the economy. Now, I hope we can avoid another self-inflicted wound like we just saw over the last couple of weeks, because we don't have time to play these partisan games. We've got too much work to do.

Over the next several months, I hope Congress is focused on what the American people are focused on, making sure that the economy is growing, making sure that businesses are getting financing, making sure that young people are getting trained for the jobs of the future, making sure that we're getting all those construction workers that got laid off after the housing boom went bust and putting them to work rebuilding our roads and our bridges, rebuilding Chicago, rebuilding Detroit, rebuilding rural communities all across the country, putting people back to work.

I want to make sure that America is not just an importer; I want us to export. I want to build electric cars in America, and I want to ship them all around the world, because we've got the best technologies. I want us to focus on how we can revamp old buildings and old facilities so they're energy efficient. And we can start cutting down on our electricity bills, and we can start cutting down on our carbon emissions. And we can stop being so dependent on foreign oil, and you don't have to pay as much at the pump. That's what the American people are looking for. That's what we've got to focus on.

We've got more work to do to make sure that we've got an immigration system in this country that makes some sense. We are a nation of laws, and we are a nation of immigrants. And we want to welcome extraordinary talent to our shores and have a legal immigration system that works for everybody. We've got to make that happen.

We've got to—and a lot of the stuff that we've already done, we've got to make sure it gets implemented effectively. We finally put some commonsense rules so that banks aren't taking the kinds of risks that almost led to an economic meltdown and that consumers are protected when you get credit cards or mortgages.

And frankly, there are some folks in Congress who are trying to block us from making that progress. And that's why your voice has to be heard, where we stand up and we say: We want a financial system that is fair for everybody. There's nothing wrong with that.

And on the foreign policy front, you elected me in part based on a promise that we would end the war in Iraq, and we have ended combat operations there. And by the end of this year, we will have our troops out of Iraq, as I promised and as I committed. And in Afghanistan, we've got Al Qaida on the run, and we are going to begin transitioning to give Afghans more responsibility, but also to start bringing our troops home, because we've got a lot of work to do here at home to rebuild America.

But our foreign policy can't just be about war, it's also got to be about peace. It's also got to be about helping countries feed the hungry. It's got to be about helping countries transition to democracy. It's got to be about respecting human rights all around the world and making sure that America continues to be a beacon of hope. That's part of why you elected me. That's part of the unfinished business of this administration.

And as we think about this world, we understand that it's shrunk and it's going to be more competitive. And if we're going to leave the kind of America behind to our children and our grandchildren, then we've still got some work to do. Yes, we've got to get our fiscal house in order. And all the progressives out there, I want you to understand that we can't just ignore this debt and deficit, we've got to do something about it. But economic growth, making ourselves more competitive isn't just about cutting programs. It's also about making investments in our people.

It's also about making sure we've got the best education system in the world, that we've got the best scientists and engineers and mathematicians in the world, making sure that we prize our diversity, making sure that we've got a social safety net for the aged and the infirm and our children. That's part of what makes us a great nation.

So Chicago, we've got more work to do. We've got more work to do. And look, let me just say this, it is going to continue to be challenging every single step of the way.

Audience member. But we can do it!

The President. But we can do it. [Applause] You know, I'm always amused when the pundits in Washington say, "Boy, you know, Obama hasn't gotten this passed yet" or "Some of his supporters are disappointed about this" and "The campaign, it was so smooth." And I'm thinking, what campaign were they watching? [Laughter] I mean, there—at least once a month, folks would say, "He can't win." At least once a month, people would say, "Oh, that was a terrible debate for him" or "Oh, he's lost support in this or that group" or "Oh, that State is going to go red on him."

What they didn't understand was, is that for all the mistakes I'll make, for all the boneheaded moves I made—might make, for all the frustrations and the challenges and resistance we have to bringing about change, when I've got you guys behind me, when I've got the American people, when I listen to them and I'm reminded of your decency and those core values that say, I am my brother's keeper, and I am my sister's keeper, and what makes us a great nation is not just the height of our skyscrapers or the size of our GDP or the power of our military, but the fact that we look after one another and we take responsibility for ourselves, but also for our neighbors, when we're working together and we're joining hands, Black and White and Hispanic and Asian and Native American and gay and straight—when the American people join together, we cannot be stopped.

We say to ourselves, "Yes we can." It doesn't matter how tough a week I have in Washington, because I know you've got me—you've got my back. When I come to Chicago,

when I travel across the country, I know we can't be stopped. I know America is the greatest nation on Earth. And I know we will bring about the change that all of us believe in.

God bless you all. Thank you, and God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:22 p.m. at the Aragon Entertainment Center.

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

Locations: Chicago, IL.

Names: Corner, Greg; Durbin, Richard J.; Emanuel, Rahm I.; Hancock, Herbie; Hudson, Jennifer; Jones, Emil, Jr.; Obama, Malia; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Quinn, Patrick J., III; Schakowsky, Janice D.; White, Jesse.

Subjects: Afghanistan : Afghan military and security forces; Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, repeal; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Improvement; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Strengthening efforts; Business and industry : Global competitiveness; Civil rights : Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, equality; Civil rights : Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009; Commerce, international : U.S. exports :: Expansion; Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Developing countries : Food aid :: U.S. programs; Economy, national : Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Financial regulations, modernization efforts; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Global competitiveness; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies : Promotion efforts; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: U.S. production; Energy : Energy efficiency and weatherization :: Homes and buildings; Energy : Foreign sources; Energy : Gasoline, oil, and natural gas costs; Energy : Hybrid and alternative fuel automobiles :: Promotion efforts; Energy : Solar and wind energy; Environment : Carbon emissions; Foreign policy, U.S. : Civil and human rights, promotion efforts; Foreign policy, U.S. : Democratization; Foreign policy, U.S. : Humanitarian assistance programs; Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Health and medical care : Research and development; Illinois : Democratic Party events; Illinois : Governor; Illinois : President's visit; Immigration and naturalization : American "melting pot"; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Terrorism : Al Qaida terrorist group; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts.

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