

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser in New York City
August 11, 2011

The President. Well, I must say, first of all, this is a pretty good-looking crowd. [*Laughter*] I want to thank Harvey and Georgina and Anna and Shelby for being such extraordinary hosts. To Governor Cuomo, congratulations on the great work that you've been doing here in the great State of New York. And to all of you, thanks for being here.

What I'm going to do is, I enjoy having a conversation as opposed to giving a long speech, although I've been known to—[*laughter*]. So I'm just going to make a few brief remarks at the top.

Obviously, this country has gone through as tough of a time as we've seen in my lifetime over the last 2½ years. But even by those standards, this last month and a half have been extraordinary. And I was just in Michigan at a advanced battery plant. We actually have jump-started an entire industry here in the United States, building advanced batteries that are going to go into electric vehicles. Not only does it create jobs, manufacturing jobs that pay well, but it also is going to make a huge contribution in terms of our environment and reducing carbon emissions.

And when you couple it with the fact that for the first time in 30 years we've not only raised fuel efficiency standards, but we actually were able to get the entire industry to agree voluntarily to double fuel efficiency standards by the biggest environmental step we've made in the last 30 years on that front.

What was remarkable was to see outside of Washington the enthusiasm, the energy, the hopefulness, the decency of the American people. And what I said to them is you deserve better. You deserve better than you've been getting out of Washington over the last 2½ months, for that matter, for the last 2½ years.

What's striking as I travel around the country is people understand that this country is going through a fundamental change because of globalization, because of technology, and they recognize that we've got to up our game. We're going to have to be more competitive. We're going to have to educate our kids better. We're going to have to design our businesses more effectively. We're going to have to revamp how all sorts of systems work in order for us to meet the challenge of the 21st century.

And they're ready to go, and they're doing it at the local level. Businesses are getting smarter and more productive, and workers are going back to school to retrain, and people are cooperating in their communities to redesign how they live and work and play and educate their kids.

And so they look at what's happening in Washington, and they think, these folks are really from outer space, because they don't seem to understand how critical it is for us all to work together—Republicans, Democrats, Independents—in order to move this country forward.

Now, here's the good news. As frustrating as the last couple of months have been, I think as Washington reached a low watermark, I think that the country suddenly realized exactly what Harvey just said, which is, we're going to have to get involved, and we're going to have to

get engaged, and we're going to have to speak out, and we're going to have to register the fact that we expect more and we expect better.

And if that energy is harnessed and tapped, then I'm absolutely convinced that this country is going to be on the upswing over the next few years. There is not a single problem we're facing that we cannot solve—I won't say easily, but we can't solve—with some determination and some hard work.

We can put people back to work, and we can get this economy growing again, if we're putting in place some sensible policies of the sort that were reflected at this advanced battery plant that I saw. We can educate our kids. We know what works. There are schools in New York City that take kids from the toughest neighborhoods, and those kids excel. And they're going to top colleges and doing great. The problem is we just haven't been able to scale up, partly because of our politics.

We know what it takes to change the energy equation in this country and free ourselves from dependence on foreign oil. And it doesn't require radical changes in our behavior. It requires us taking smart, sensible steps. And the fact that we have been putting this off decade after decade is a tragedy. But it can be fixed.

Our health care system, the most expensive in the world, but doesn't give us the best outcomes. We know what to do in order to fix it, and we've made great strides with health care reform, but we've got more work to do.

And the debt, I don't know if you've noticed, but when the stock market went down, what did everybody buy after the downgrade?

Audience member. Treasuries.

The President. U.S. treasuries.

Audience members. Yes.

The President. Everybody understands that the United States still has the greatest economic potential and the greatest businesses, the greatest universities on Earth, and the greatest workers on Earth. And so the market voted with its feet in terms of its confidence in the marketplace. And what they also understand is, if we were just willing to make some modest adjustments to our Tax Code and to how entitlement programs like Medicare and Medicaid work, this problem would vanish. We could solve it.

So the upshot is this. When I ran in 2008, I think that a lot of folks believed we elect Obama and suddenly we're going to fix politics in Washington. And Andrew is familiar with this, because everybody figures, well, we're going to fix politics in Albany. And then it turns out that there are a lot of bad habits that have been built up over time and we're also a big, diverse country and not everybody agrees with me, not everybody agrees with the folks who live in Manhattan—[laughter]—west of here. [Laughter] You guys may not be familiar with it. [Laughter]

And so democracy is messy, and it's tough, and our system is broken to a large degree. And that makes this election more important than 2008. Two thousand eight put us in a position to do some extraordinary things, and I can't be prouder of what we did. But in 2008, I also think everybody figured, we get through this one election and then it's all done. And then, after 2½ years, and it's been tough, and there have been setbacks, there are a lot of folks who suddenly feel deflated, this is hard, I'm not sure I believe in change. [Laughter] They've still

got the Obama poster, but it's all kind of frayed. *[Laughter]* And Obama is grayer. *[Laughter]* He doesn't seem as cool. *[Laughter]*

But in some ways, that's a healthy thing, because what that means is in 2012, as Harvey just said, we realize this is about us. This is not about my election; it's not about one person. It's about competing visions about where we're going to take the country. Are we going to have a country that's inclusive? Are we going to have a country that gives opportunity to everybody? Are we going to have a country where everybody is sharing sacrifices, but also sharing opportunities? Are we going to have a country in which what we project to the world is not just our military might, but it's also our capacity to champion human rights and women's rights and feed folks and help them become self-sufficient?

And those competing visions are going to be determined in this next election as much as they ever have before. And so I hope you guys aren't tired because we've got a lot more work to do. And this is an ongoing project.

I'm going—on the 28th, I'm going to be at the dedication of the new King Memorial, which I've flown over, and it looks spectacular. And now that King has his own memorial on the Mall I think that we forget, when he was alive, there was nobody who was more vilified, nobody who was more controversial, nobody who was more despairing at times. There was a decade that followed the great successes of Birmingham and Selma in which he was just struggling, fighting the good fight, and scorned, and many folks angry. But what he understood, what kept him going, was that the arc of moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice. But it doesn't bend on its own. It bends because all of us are putting our hand on the arc and we are bending it in that direction. And it takes time. And it's hard work. And there are frustrations.

And if everybody here is reminded of that fact, then I'm absolutely confident that America's arc is going to be bending in the direction of justice and prosperity and opportunity.

So I hope you will join me. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:15 p.m. at the residence of movie producer Harvey Weinstein. In his remarks, he referred to Marchesa cofounder Georgina Chapman, wife of Mr. Weinstein; Anna Wintour, editor in chief, Vogue magazine, and her partner J. Shelby Bryan, chairman of the board of directors and chief executive officer, PingTone Communications, Inc.; and Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo of New York. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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Names: Bryan, J. Shelby; Chapman, Georgina; Cuomo, Andrew M.; Weinstein, Harvey; Wintour, Anna.

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congressional elections; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Energy : Carbon dioxide emissions, reduction; Energy : Foreign sources; Energy : Fuel efficiency standards, strengthening efforts; Energy : Hybrid and alternative fuel automobiles :: Battery technology, U.S. production; Environment : Quality and improvement efforts; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Michigan : Johnson Controls, Inc., in Holland; Michigan : President's visit; New York : Democratic Party events; New York : Governor; New York : President's visit; Taxation : Tax Code, reform.

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