

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

**Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser in Denver,
Colorado**

October 25, 2011

The President. Hello, Colorado! Thank you so much. The—let me start off just by saying that there are certain people who I'm not sure that I'd wish politics on them—[*laughter*—but I sure am glad they are in politics, and Michael Bennet is one of them. He is one of the finest public servants in the country.

You know about what he did here in Denver in helping to lift up the public schools here, and you're seeing some of the foundation that he laid when he was here starting to pay off. Just before we came onstage, he told me a story about a young man who had benefited from the Denver scholarship initiative, the Denver scholarship fund, and he came to a town hall meeting. Nobody in the family had gone to college before, and now suddenly, this kid was a senior at Colorado and—Colorado College and is somebody who is——

[*At this point, an audience member fell.*]

The President. ——everybody all right there? Somebody fall down? No, they've been standing too long. [*Laughter*] No, no, the—I'm kidding. Do we have an EMT here? Okay. All right. Make sure she's okay. I think—no, I think she'll be fine. And, Michael, this is no reflection on the length of your introduction. [*Laughter*]

But Michael was telling a story about how this young man now was just running the place in Colorado, excelling, had a bright future, and the satisfaction that you could hear in Michael's voice about this young man's success tells you about the kind of Senator he is.

In Washington, there are workhorses, and there are show horses. And Michael is a workhorse, and he's working hard on behalf of the people of Colorado every single day. We could not be prouder of him, and I couldn't be prouder of calling him a friend.

Now, in addition to Michael, we've got another outstanding public servant here. I think he's still here. Your own mayor, Michael Hancock's in the house. We appreciate the work that he's doing. He is—you know he's tough because he's the youngest of 10 kids. [*Laughter*] And he cares deeply about the people of Denver and the people of Colorado. And I'm confident he's going to do just as outstanding a job as your current Governor, Governor Hickenlooper, who was here earlier. So we are—you guys are doing a good job electing the right people here in Colorado. That's all I can say.

Now, I am here not just because I need your help; I'm here, more importantly, because America needs your help. I need—I'm here because your country needs your help. I'm here because if you thought the last election was important, then wait till you get a load of this election. [*Laughter*] I can promise——

Audience member. We got your back!

The President. I appreciate that.

I promise you that what we determine over the next 12 months is going to help shape the future of our children and our grandchildren like just about no other election that we've seen.

And part of the reason is because the choices are going to be starker and the stakes are going to be higher. And Michael, I think, aptly described what's at stake.

For the past 3 years we've had two kinds of crises. We've had an economic crisis and a financial crisis, but we've also had a political crisis. And those crises are not yet solved. We've got more work to do.

Right now, all across the country, people are crying out for action. Right here in Colorado, there are folks who are hurting: people living paycheck to paycheck, day to day, people losing their homes, people seeing their businesses closed, people who are wondering if anybody is listening. Even the folks who are doing well are having to make decisions that they didn't have to make 10 years ago, that their parents didn't have to make: Maybe we can't eat out tonight because we can't pay the mortgage; maybe we have to delay retirement in order for our child to go to college.

These Americans are not asking for much. They don't expect government to solve all their problems. They don't want a handout. But they do believe what I'm confident everybody here believes, which is that America should be a place where you can make it if you try, where no matter who you are, no matter what you look like, no matter where you come from, if you are willing to put in the work and dream big dreams and make the effort and act responsibly, that you can succeed. That's the essence of what America has always been about.

Americans believe that the economy works best when it works for everybody, not just those at the top. They believe that hard work should pay off and responsibility should be rewarded, that everybody should get a fair shake and everybody should do their fair share. These aren't Democratic values. They are not Republican values. They are American values. They're the bedrock of how this country was built.

And they're the reason I decided to run for office and the reason I ran for President. They're the reason Michael ran for Senator. Because we believe that these values could not just be reflected in our neighborhoods and our workplaces, in our communities and our churches and our synagogues and our mosques, but they also had to be reflected in our government; that there are certain commitments we make to each other as citizens that have to be upheld. And we weren't seeing that reflected in Washington.

As Michael mentioned, for a lot of folks the crisis didn't start with Lehman's. We had a decade in which wages and incomes had flatlined, while the cost of everything from health care to a college education had been shooting up. Folks were working harder and harder just to stay in place. They took out loans, spouse went into the workplace. They just barely were able to keep it together. And that was before the crisis struck.

And so when I decided to run for office, what I said to myself was that if we can harness the energy of the American people, the decency of the American people, if we can direct the common sense of the American people and start operating not based on the next election, but thinking about the next generation, then there's no challenge we can't solve. We've been through tougher times before. But it requires us to think about our politics in a fundamentally different way.

Now, unfortunately, Washington doesn't seem to have gotten the message yet. For the last month, we've been debating a jobs bill. We successfully stabilized an economy that was in free fall. We prevented ourselves from going into a great depression and seeing a financial meltdown. But unemployment is brutally high.

And so even as we're grappling with how do we get our finances together, how do we shrink this deficit in a responsible, balanced way, our challenge also is how do we get Americans to work right now, how do we restore a sense of momentum and confidence in the economy, even as we're solving these long-term problems.

So I put forward a jobs bill that incorporated ideas that traditionally have gotten support from Democrats and Republicans. We said, you know what, all these construction workers that got laid off after the housing bubble burst, how about putting them to work rebuilding our roads and our bridges and our schools all across the country. Not only is it good for our workers, but it's good for our economy. America became an economic superpower because we knew how to build things. We built the Golden Gate Bridge and the Hoover Dam and the Interstate Highway System. And now we're settling for China having the best high-speed rail and Singapore having better airports? When did that happen?

Let's put them to work. And traditionally, building roads hasn't just been a Democratic idea—[laughter]—right?

We said, why don't we start putting our teachers back in the classroom? We know that our kids cannot succeed unless they get the best education in the world. And despite some extraordinary reforms that we're doing all across the country, the fact of the matter is, is that State and local governments are broke and they've been laying off teachers in droves. We said, let's give them some help right now, put teachers back to work. That's not just good for the teachers, that's good for our kids. That shouldn't be a Democratic or a Republican idea.

We said, let's give tax cuts to small businesses for hiring new workers or hiring veterans. We send our men and women in uniform overseas. They sacrifice careers, they sacrifice time with their families, they risk their lives. The last thing they should have to do is fight for a job when they come home. Let's give businesses more incentive to hire them. That's not a Democratic or Republican idea, that's an American idea.

And so in—and we said, let's pay for it. It's got to be paid for. We can't afford to add to the deficit. And we put forward a balanced proposal that said those of us who have been blessed by this country, we can afford to do a little bit more to help the many out there who are struggling. Not out of any notion of, what do the Republicans call it, class warfare? [Laughter] It's because somebody looked out for me when I was out there struggling. Somebody gave me opportunity.

That's why I'm successful. That's why Michael is successful. That's why most of us are—here have been able to do well in this country. And it's common sense for me to want to give back. That's what I think most of us understood.

So independent economists looked at this jobs plan; they say this is the only jobs plan out there that in the short term and medium term is actually going to produce jobs. Independent economists who don't work for me say we could get as many as 2 million jobs created if this jobs bill plans—passes. All of which—[applause]—and by the way, when the polls are taken about the individual components of this, it turns out that the majority of Americans—not just Democrats, but Independents and Republicans—agree with many of these proposals.

Nevertheless, in the United States Senate, we had a hundred percent of Republicans voting no. They said no to putting teachers back in the classroom. They said no to making sure that construction workers can get back on the job. I'm now breaking up the bill into little pieces because they just didn't understand; it was too big. [Laughter] And so we're going to do it piece by piece and explain each time.

Last week, we had a separate vote on the teachers bill. It would put 400,000 teachers, firefighters, and police officers back to work. And I want you all to know, for somebody—to pay for it, we would be asking somebody who makes over a million dollars to pay just one-half of 1 percent more in taxes. Now, what this translates into is if you're making \$1.1 million a year, that's an extra 500 bucks. For 400,000 jobs all across the country. Isn't that an investment that's worth making, at a time when we're struggling?

Mitch McConnell was asked, "Why wouldn't you want to do this?" He said, "Saving the jobs of teachers, firefighters, cops, that's just a bailout." That's what he called it, a "bailout." A bailout? These aren't folks who acted irresponsibly. These aren't folks who were gaming the system. These are folks who teach our kids and patrol our streets and save our homes if there's a fire. They're us. They deserve support.

So this is the—this is a microcosm, this is an example of the challenge that we're going to be having over the next year and the next 2 years. Where do we want to take this country? Who are we? The other side has a very clear idea of where they want to go. Michael talked about the Ryan plan, but it's not just one plan. I mean, you're seeing it in the debates among the Presidential candidates right now. They've got a particular vision, and it basically boils down to two ideas. The first idea is, we're going to cut taxes on the wealthiest individuals, the biggest corporations, and we're going to pay for that by gutting our investments in education, in basic research, in infrastructure, and weakening our social safety net.

Now, that's not my presentation. You can look at the numbers and what they're proposing. And that is pretty much a uniform approach that they're taking. That's idea number one.

The second proposal is, we're going to gut regulations, any regulations pretty much that we can see out there. We have a once-in-a-lifetime financial crisis because of irresponsibility and reckless behavior. What's your solution? Let's roll back all the regulations that might prevent reckless behavior and irresponsible actions on the part of the financial system so they can do it again.

The—we've made enormous strides here in Colorado and all across the country in terms of clean air and clean water. So what's their solution? Let's roll back environmental protections, basic protections. Let's not just roll back regulations. Let's roll back the entire agency responsible for making sure that companies are acting responsibly when it comes to our environment.

Now, we can all agree that there are regulations out there that don't make sense, that are outdated, that need to be updated. We've identified in my administration over 500 regulatory reforms that can save us billions of dollars over the next several years. We've got to—you've got to prune government because it just adds on top of itself, and after a while, nobody's paying attention to some law that was passed back in 1920 that said everybody had to have a compass on a train—[laughter]—and didn't know there was GPS. [Laughter]

So there are reforms that have to be made. But you know what, this country is not going to compete in the 21st century based on who's got the cheapest labor and the dirtiest air and the dirtiest water. That race to the bottom is not a race we want to be on. I want a race to the top. I want a race to the future. That's what we're fighting for.

I reject the idea that America is going to be more successful if we abandon the 30 million people who don't have health insurance that are going to get health insurance because of the Affordable Care Act or the million young people who right now have health insurance because

we passed that law and are now able to stay on their parent's health insurance until they can find a job that provides them health insurance.

And look, here's the other thing. The arguments that the other side's making, they're not new. We tried them. We tried them for a decade, and they didn't work. They didn't help to build the middle class. They didn't alleviate the stress on families out there that are struggling to get by. They added to the burden. They made it tougher, and it made it—they made us less competitive.

So not only will their vision not work, it's also not who we are. We don't have that kind of cramped vision of what America should be. We don't have a vision of America that says you're on your own. Yes, we are rugged individualists. We are strong and self-reliant. Our economy grows because of extraordinary entrepreneurs and people who are out there pursuing their dreams and pursuing their ideas. That's part of who we are. But we're also a country that understands we're in this together, that we are connected, that I will be more successful if you are successful.

And that is something that was understood by Abraham Lincoln when he invested in the National Academy of Sciences in the midst of the Civil War and started land-grant colleges. It was understood by Dwight Eisenhower when he built the Interstate Highway System and invested in math and science to make sure that we could win the space race. It was understood by JFK when he looked up at the Moon and he said, you know what, I know it's far away, but we can get there if we pull together. And we did.

Audience member. Yes, we did.

The President. Yes, we did.

And it was understood by Republicans in Congress when they worked with FDR to get the GI bill passed, because they said to themselves, young men who were coming back from war, like my grandfather, if we give them an education, that's not just going to be good for them, that's going to be good for the entire country. That will grow a middle class, and business will have more customers, and people will rise out of poverty, and folks at the very top will do even better because of the success of the country as a whole. It's not just a Democratic idea.

And it's because of that idea that I can stand here before you. Because Michelle and I, we didn't grow up in fame and fortune. But we were singularly blessed to grow up in the United States of America. And that's the idea that got me to run for President in 2008. That's the idea that got you to support me in 2008. And that's the idea that we've got to finish. That's the idea that we've got to complete.

And here's the last point I want to make, and that is that as difficult as change may be, change is possible. And if you doubt that change is possible, think about even as we have struggled with an incredibly difficult economy, even as we have struggled with a resistant opposition—[laughter]—you like my word choice there? [Laughter] Think about what we've done.

Let me tell you what change looks like. Change looks like the Affordable Care Act and 30 million people getting health insurance and patients knowing that when they buy health insurance, they're not going to get cheated.

Change is \$60 billion that used to go into banks who were running the student loan program now going directly to students and millions more children out there able to get scholarships and get loans and going to college like never before.

Change is saying that if you love this country and you want to serve it, then it shouldn't matter who you love, you should be able to love this country, and we ended "don't ask, don't tell."

Change is doubling fuel standards, mileage standards, on cars and trucks—unprecedented over the last 30 years—and in the process saving an auto industry that is now competing all around the world and making a profit for the first time in a very long time and building electric cars and the cars of the future.

And change is ending a war and bringing our troops home for the holidays and making sure that—[*applause*]*—*making sure America is leading once again. Making sure that America's leading once again not only because of our extraordinary military, but also because of the skill of our diplomacy and the power of our ideals and our example.

That's what change is. That is what you accomplished. This election is not going to be about me. Once again, it's going to be about you. It's going to be about your commitments to each other, about our commitments as citizens to the United States of America and all that it can be.

When I decided to run and some of you decided to support me—[*laughter*]*—*let me just say that you didn't sign up for something easy. You didn't sign up—you know, you were supporting a candidate for President named Barack Hussein Obama. We knew that wouldn't necessarily poll well. [*Laughter*] So there were—there was an easier path to be had. But you understood then, as I hope you understand now, that this was always about your deepest dreams and aspirations for your family and your children and your grandchildren and your country. And nothing's more powerful when—than when the American people make a decision that they want to bring about the sorts of changes that reflect our best ideals. When that happens, you guys can't be stopped.

And so even though my hair is a little grayer now—[*laughter*]*—*even though I turned 50 and my girls say I look distinguished, but Michelle says I just look old—[*laughter*]*—*even though there have been setbacks and there have been frustrations and sometimes the pace of change is painfully slow, I want you to understand that we've got more work to do. Our job is not yet done.

We've got—we still have within our grasp the ability to make sure that once again America is a place where anybody can make it if they try. That's what we're fighting for. That's what this campaign will be about. That's why I will need you.

And so I want you all to understand that, yes, it's true I may be older, but let me tell you, my commitment is unwavering. I am as determined as ever. I am as hopeful as ever. And most importantly, I believe in you and the American people as much as I ever have.

So let's get to work, let's get busy, and let's prove once again why the United States of America is the greatest country on Earth.

God bless you. God bless the United States of America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:41 p.m. at the Ridgeline restaurant at the Pepsi Center. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 26.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Democratic National Committee fundraiser :: Denver, CO.

Locations: Denver, CO.

Names: Bennet, Michael F.; Hancock, Michael B.; Hickenlooper, John W.; McConnell, A. Mitchell; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Ryan, Paul D.

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 : Small businesses :: Hiring incentives; Colorado : Colorado College in Colorado Springs; Colorado : Democratic Party events; Colorado : Governor; Colorado : President's visit; Congress : Bipartisanship; Congress : Senate :: Minority leader; Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Financial regulations, modernization efforts; Economy, national : Household incomes, decline; 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 : Reform legislation; Education : Standards and school accountability; Education : Teachers; Elections : 2012 Presidential and congressional elections; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment rate; Energy : Fuel efficiency standards, strengthening efforts; Energy : Hybrid and alternative fuel automobiles :: Battery technology, U.S. production; Environment : Air quality, improvement efforts; Environment : Water quality, improvement efforts; Environmental Protection Agency; Foreign policy, U.S. : Democratization; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Health and medical care : Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act; Health and medical care : Young adults :: Insurance coverage as dependents, age limit extension; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Taxation : Corporate tax rates; Taxation : Tax Code, reform; Taxation : Tax relief; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts; Veterans : Hiring incentives.

DCPD Number: DCPD201100796.