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Remarks at an Obama Victory Fund 2012 Fundraiser in New York City

November 30, 2011

Hello, New York! It is good to be in New York in the holiday season. Everybody is out and about, there's a little nip in the air, Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center up and lit. Something about this time of year makes this city feel like anything is possible. It is great to be here. And I see some familiar faces in the crowd, so thank you for being here.

We have some special guests. All of you are special, but I want to make sure that you acknowledge them. First of all, the head of the DNC, Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, is here. She's doing an outstanding job. One of the finest public servants we have up and coming, New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman is in the house. The New York City public advocate, Bill de Blasio is here. And give it up for the folks who performed for you; Ali Wentworth and Regina Spektor, thank you.

Now, I am here today because I need your help. But I'm also here because the country needs your help. There was a reason why so many of you worked so hard on our 2008 campaign, and it wasn't because you thought that it was going to be a cakewalk to elect Barack Hussein Obama. [*Laughter*] If you were going for easy, that was not the route to take. You did not take a poll that told you that this was going to be a sure thing. And besides, our campaign was not about me, it was about a vision that we shared for America. It wasn't a narrow, cramped vision of an America where everybody is fending for themselves. It was a vision of a big and a compassionate America, where everybody who works hard has a chance to get ahead, not just those at the very top, not just those born into wealth or privilege, a vision that says the more Americans who succeed, the more America succeeds.

That's the vision that we share. That's the change that we believed in. And we knew it wasn't going to come easy, and we knew it wasn't going to come quickly. But 3 years later, because of what you did in 2008, we have already started to see what change looks like.

Think about it. Change is the first bill I signed into law, a law that says you get an equal day's work—somebody who puts in an equal day's work should get equal day's pay, because our daughters should be treated just like our sons and have the same opportunities. That's change.

Change is the decision we made to rescue the auto company from collapse, even when some politicians were saying we should let Detroit go bankrupt. Change is the more than 1 million jobs that we saved and the local businesses that are picking up again and the fuel-efficient cars that are now rolling off the assembly lines with that word "Made in America" stamped on them.

Change is the decision we made to stop waiting for Congress to do something about our addiction to oil and finally raise fuel efficiency standards for the first time in 30 years. And because of that, by the next decade, we'll be driving cars that get 55 miles a gallon at least. That's what change is.

Change is the fight we won to stop handing out $60 billion worth of tax subsidies to banks and put that $60 billion into student loans. And today, millions of students are getting more help going to college at a time when they need it most. That's because of your work in 2008.

Change is health care reform that we passed after a century of trying, reform that will finally ensure that in the United States of America, nobody is going to go bankrupt because they get sick. And you've got a million young people who are already with health insurance today, on their parent's plan because of the laws that we passed. Change is the millions of Americans who can no longer be denied or dropped from their health insurance at a time when they need the care the most. That's what change is.

Change is the fact that for the first time in history, you don't have to hide who you love in order to serve the country that you love—ending "don't ask, don't tell." Change is keeping one of the first promises I made in 2008: By the end of December, the war in Iraq will be officially over, our troops are coming home. They will be rejoining their families for the holidays.

And it hasn't made us weaker, it's made us stronger. We've refocused our efforts on the terrorists who actually carried out 9/11. And thanks to our brave men and women in uniform, Al Qaida is weaker than it has ever been and Usama bin Laden will never walk this Earth again. That's because of what you did in 2008.

A lot of this wasn't easy. Some of it was risky. It came in the face of tough opposition and powerful lobbyists and special interests who spent millions of dollars to keep things the way they were. It's no secret that the steps we took haven't always been politically popular with the crowd in Washington. But all this progress was made because of you, because you stood up and made your voices heard, because you knocked on doors and you made phone calls and sent out emails. And you kept up the fight for change long after the election was over.

You should be proud of what got done. It should make you hopeful. But it can't make us complacent, because everything that we fought for during the last election and everything that we still have to do to make sure this country gives a fair shot to everybody is at stake in 2012. Every single thing that we care about is at stake in this next election. The very core of what this country stands for is on the line. The basic promise that no matter who you are, no matter where you come from, this is a place where you can make it if we try.

You know, I just came from another fundraising event at the home of somebody now extraordinarily successful. His parents were Holocaust survivors, and he described, in introducing me, how they were able to come over here with almost nothing and yet still provide a good public education for their kids and still give them a leg up and allow them to succeed. And the question is, 20 years from now, 30 years from now, are we going to be able to say the same thing about the next generation coming up?

The crisis that struck in the months before I took office put more Americans out of work than at any time since the Great Depression. And if you actually look at a chart, 3 months before I was sworn in we lost 4 million jobs; 3 months after I was sworn in we lost another 4 million. A few months later, because of our economic policies, the economy started to grow again and people started going to work again. And we've had private sector job growth for 21 consecutive months.

But that 8 million that lost their jobs, it has been brutal. And it was the culmination of a decade in which the middle class fell further and further behind. More good jobs in manufacturing left our shores. More of our prosperity was built on risky financial deals or on a housing bubble, and we racked up greater piles of debt, even as our incomes fell and our wages flatlined and the cost of everything from college to health care kept on going up.

These problems didn't happen overnight, and they weren't going to be solved overnight. And it's going to take more than a few years to meet the challenges that had been decades in

the making. The American people understand that. But what the American people don't understand are leaders who refuse to take action at such a critical time in this Nation's history. They're sick and tired of watching people who are supposed to represent America put party ahead of country or the next election ahead of the next generation.

President Kennedy used to say, after he took office, what surprised him most about Washington was finding out that things were just as bad as he'd been saying they were. [*Laughter*] And I can relate to that. [*Laughter*] When you've got the top Republican in the Senate saying almost from the get-go that his number-one concern, his party's number-one priority, wasn't to fix the economy, wasn't to put people back to work, but was to beat the President, then you get a sense that things really aren't on the level.

That's how you end up with Republicans in Congress voting against all kinds of jobs proposals that they supported in the past: tax cuts for workers, tax cuts for small businesses, rebuilding roads and bridges, putting cops and teachers back to work. And they're at it again right now.

Last year, right around this time, both parties came together to cut payroll taxes for the typical household by a thousand dollars this year. And that helped boost the economy at a time when it was weak. And it is still weak, so we should be doing the same thing. Except the tax cut is set to expire by the end of this month, and if that happens, a typical middle class family will see a thousand dollar tax increase at the worst possible time for the economy and for these families.

So what I've said is, let's not just extend that tax cut another year to help folks get back on solid footing, let's expand it. Let's give the typical working family a $1,500 tax cut. And while we're at it, let's cut taxes for small businesses who are creating jobs in America. Some Republicans used to love these tax cuts, until I proposed them. [*Laughter*] Suddenly, they've started lining up against them. A lot of them have sworn—they've taken an oath: "We're never going to raise taxes as long as we live"—religion.

But now they're voting against this tax cut, and as a consequence, you could potentially see working folks see an extra thousand dollars coming out of their paycheck this year. They'll fight with everything they have to protect the tax cuts of the wealthiest Americans, but they've got no problem breaking the oath when it comes to raising taxes on middle class families, just to score some political points.

And they may think that's a smart political strategy, although I'm noticing that over the last couple of days they've been realizing this may not work out so well for them. [*Laughter*] It's not a strategy to create jobs. It's not a strategy to help middle class families who have been working two to three shifts just to put food on the table. And it's not a strategy to help America succeed, and we've all got a stake in that.

If you were able to come to this fundraiser, you've probably got a job, and you're doing pretty well, relatively speaking. But you know what, our success depends on everybody's success. If you've got a business, you need customers. If you're a law firm, you need clients. If you've got a restaurant, you need somebody who can afford to buy dinner at your restaurant. If you are a parent, then it's not good enough that you can get a good education for your child, because your child's success is going to depend on how well educated every child is in this country.

We have a choice in 2012. The question is not whether people are still hurting or whether the economy is growing as fast as it should be—it is not. A lot of folks are still hurting out there.

Of course the economy is still struggling. The question is, what are we going to do about it; what vision do we have for where we want to take this country? And it is not a technical question, it is a values question. It's about who we are, what we believe in. And that's the debate that we're going to have to have over the next year. It's about where we're going to go.

The Republicans in Congress and the candidates who are running for President—I hope all of you are watching these Republican debates. [*Laughter*] You need to see what's going on to get a sense of what's at stake. [*Laughter*] They've got a very specific idea about where they want to take this country. They want to reduce the deficit, which we need to do, not in a balanced way, but by gutting our investments in education, by slashing spending in research and technology, by letting our infrastructure, our roads and our bridges and our airports, crumble.

Now, I believe that since I already signed a law that reduced our deficit by a trillion dollars and I proposed to do another $2.5 million in deficit reduction, I've got some credibility in saying that I'm prepared to make some tough decisions to close that gap. But we've got to do it in a way that is fair for everybody. And that means asking the wealthiest among us to do our fair share. That we don't just ask for sacrifices from seniors, we don't just ask for sacrifices from union members, we don't just ask for sacrifices from teachers, we ask for sacrifices from the people who are in the best position to sacrifice. That's a fundamental difference in—[*applause*]—it's a fundamental difference in our vision about where we want to take this country.

The Republicans in Congress and on the campaign trail want to make Medicare a form of private insurance that seniors have to shop for with a voucher that most independent analysts say won't cover the full cost of their health care. Now, I believe we can lower the cost of Medicare—and we need to—with reforms that still guarantee a dignified retirement that our seniors have earned. That's what I believe. That is a values question. It is not just a technical question.

They think the best way for America to compete for new jobs and businesses is to follow other countries in a race to the bottom. So their attitude is, well, since places like China allow companies to pay much lower wages, let's roll back our minimum wage. Let's eliminate our right to organize here at home. Since other countries allow corporations to pollute as much as they want, we need to get rid of our regulations that protect us from dirty air and dirty water.

I don't think we should have any more regulations than the health and safety of the American people require. And I've already made reforms that will save businesses billions of dollars. We've put in place fewer regulations than the Bush administration, although the benefits have been a lot higher.

But I don't believe that a race to the bottom is a race that America should try to win. We should be in a race to the top. And that is a race we can win. We shouldn't be competing to see if we can pay the lowest wages, we should be competing to see if our schools are the envy of the world. If we're giving our workers the best skills and the best training and we're putting a college education within the reach of every young person who wants to go, that should be the race that we're trying to win.

We should be in a race to give our businesses the best access to the newest airports and the newest roads and the newest bridges, the most Internet access. We should be in a race to support the scientists and researchers who are trying to make the next breakthrough in clean

energy or medicine and make it happen right here in the United States of America. That's the race we should be in.

We should be in a race to make sure that the next generation of manufacturing takes root not in Asia, not in Europe, but in Detroit and Cleveland and Pittsburgh and here in New York. I don't want this country to just be known for buying and consuming. I want us to be known for building and selling products all around the world. That's what we should be focused on. And this competition for new jobs and new businesses, middle class security, that's a race we can win. That's a race we can win.

You know, I took a trip to Asia, and here, sometimes the pundits and the newspapers and the TV commentators love to talk about how America is slipping and America is in decline, and you know what, that's not what you feel when you're in Asia. They're looking to us for leadership. They know that America is great not just because we're powerful, but also because we have a set of values that the world admires, that we don't just think about what's good for us, but we're also thinking about what's good for the world. That's what makes us special. That's what makes us exceptional.

But we can't win this race and we can't continue American leadership with an attitude that says, it's every American for themselves. We're not going to win it if our whole philosophy is built on handing out more tax cuts to people who don't need them and weren't even asking for them and telling companies, don't worry, you can play by your own set of rules regardless of the consequences, and hope that the success of the wealthiest few translates somehow into prosperity for everybody else. That is not how America was built. That theory does not work. It didn't work when Herbert Hoover called it "trickle-down economics" before the Depression. It didn't work when we tried it in the last decade. It won't work today.

It won't work because we aren't a country that practices survival of the fittest. We believe in the survival of the Nation, and we believe that we all have a stake in each other's success. We believe that if we can attract outstanding teachers to the profession by giving him or her the pay that they deserve and that teacher goes on to educate some real smart kid, the next Steve Jobs, we all benefit. That's good for all of us. If we provide faster Internet service to rural America and that store owner out in some small town is now selling his goods all around the world, that's good for all of us. If we build a new bridge that saves a shipping company time and money, workers and customers all over the country will do better. If we have rules in place that protect consumers from unscrupulous financial practices, that will be good for the consumer, and by the way, that will be good for the financial system.

This idea has not been, historically, a Democratic or a Republican idea, this is an American idea. The first Republican President—pretty good President, guy named Abraham Lincoln—[*laughter*]—launched the transcontinental railroad, the National Academy of Sciences, the first land-grant colleges, Government programs in the middle of a Civil War. It was a Republican—Teddy Roosevelt—who called for a progressive income tax, saying, you know what, I want each generation to have opportunity, and we don't want just a small segment of our society that is able to amass more and more political power. It was a Republican—Dwight Eisenhower—who built the Interstate Highway System. Republicans participated with FDR in giving millions of returning heroes, including my grandfather, the chance to go to college on the GI bill. This is an American idea.

And that same spirit of common purpose, it still exists. I see it every single day, maybe not always in Washington, but out in America, it's there. Here in New York, it's there. It's in small towns, it's in big cities. You talk to folks on Main Streets, you talk to folks in town halls, you go

to a diner, our politics may be divided, but most Americans still understand we will stand or fall together. And no matter who we are, no matter where we come from, we're one Nation, and we're one people. And that's what's at stake in this election. That's what this election is all about.

Now, I know it has been 3 wrenching years for this country. And when you look back at 2008, I think a lot of folks thought, boy, this is so exciting, and it's going to just—we're going to snap our fingers, and as soon as we get in there everything will be solved. And after all that's happened in Washington, it may be tempting to believe that, you know what, change isn't as possible as we thought. But I've got to remind people of what I said not just during the campaign, but even on the night we won. I said real change, big change, is hard. It takes time. It takes more than a single term. It may take more than a single President. It requires ordinary citizens who are committed to keep—continuing the fight, to keep pushing, to keep inching this country closer to its highest ideals.

It's how this Nation was created: a band of colonists deciding, you know what, we're going to try this new idea, a government of and by and for the people. It's how the greatest generation was able to overcome more than a decade of war and a depression to build the largest middle class in history.

It's how young people fought against billy clubs and fire hoses and dogs to ensure that their kids and their grandkids could grow up in a country where there was no barrier to who you can become.

Change has always been hard, but it's possible. I've seen it, and I have lived it, and so have many of you. So you know, I've been saying at some of these fundraisers and events around the country, you know, I know I'm a little grayer than I was. [*Laughter*] And I know that the cynicism has risen again since the last election. And I know that folks are frustrated with Washington. But the only way to end the game-playing and the point-scoring that passes for politics this day is to send a message in this election that we are not backing down, we are not giving up, that we are going to keep pushing and we continue to fight and we still hope and we are still going after change that we believe in.

And I'm going to need you to do it. I've often—I've said—I said this all the time during the campaign: I am not a perfect man; I will not be a perfect President. But there are some things I can promise you: I will always tell you what I believe in, I will always tell you where I stand, and every single day I am thinking about you, your families, our kids, and how we can make America work for everybody. That's always been my promise. And I've kept that promise.

So if you're willing to keep pushing through all the frustrations that we may see and if you keep reminding yourselves of all that we've accomplished so far and if you keep your eyes on that prize, all the things that we can accomplish over the next 5 years, change will come.

If you are willing to work harder in this election than you did in the last election, change will come. If you are willing to get on the phone again and knock on doors again, change will come. If you stick with me on this, change will come. Press on, everybody. Change will come.

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:09 p.m. in the Sheraton New York Towers and Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Jack Rosen, chair, American Jewish Congress.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Obama Victory Fund 2012 fundraisers :: New York City.

Locations: New York City.

Names: de Blasio, Bill; McConnell, A. Mitchell; Rosen, Jack; Schneiderman, Eric T.; Spektor, Regina; Wasserman Schultz, Deborah; Wentworth, Alexandra "Ali".

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; Business and industry : Manufacturing industry :: Advanced manufacturing, promotion efforts; Business and industry : Small businesses :: Hiring incentives; Civil rights : Wage equality; Communications : Broadband technology; Congress : Senate :: Minority leader; Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Financial regulations, modernization efforts; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Teachers; Elections : 2012 Presidential and congressional elections; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Energy : Fuel efficiency standards, strengthening efforts; Government organization and employees : Federal regulations :: Review; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; New York : Democratic Party events; New York : President's visit; Science and technology : Research and development; Taxation : Payroll tax cut; Taxation : Tax Code, reform; Terrorism : Al Qaida terrorist group; Terrorism : Counterterrorism efforts; Terrorism : September 11, 2001, attacks; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts.

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