

Remarks at an Obama Victory Fund 2012 Fundraiser in Chicago, Illinois
January 11, 2012

Hello, everybody! Oh, it is good to be home. And it is—you are right, Stuart, I see so many familiar faces. But first of all, obviously, I've got to thank the Taylor family for their wonderful hospitality. To all the folks who helped make this evening possible, I appreciate you. I just see all my neighbors. Is somebody mowing the grass in front of my house? *[Laughter]* I'm going to go over there and check. *[Laughter]* Because I don't want you guys talking about me. "He's a good President, but nobody's mowing the lawn—bringing down property values." *[Laughter]*

A couple of people I want to acknowledge who are here. Oops, that's the wrong one. *[Laughter]* Hold on a second, because these folks—there we go. First of all, somebody who has been a great friend of mine, one of the finest public servants in the land, our senior Senator Dick Durbin is in the house. Dick is around here somewhere. Somebody who I knew before she got into politics as an extraordinary advocate for youth, continues to do great work—Heather Steans is here.

We've got Alderman Willie Cochran is here. Where's Alderman? He's over there. Hey, Willie. And then I've got another alderman who used to work for me—*[laughter]*—and in my first State senate campaign was basically my only staff person. *[Laughter]* And now he is a big shot, but I will always remember the fact that he was there back when nobody could pronounce my name—Will Burns is in the house. Where's Will? There he is. Will Burns. It's good to see you.

And then all of you are here. *[Laughter]* And I'm looking around, I see folks who first hired me for—as a summer associate. Between Eden and Tom, they can take—and John—they can take responsibility for me meeting Michelle. If it had not been for them, it would not have happened.

I've got Allison and folks who stole me from Sidley, so you can blame them if—*[laughter]*—but I've got folks here who watched our kids grow up, who we played basketball together, we worked out together, we saw each other at various functions and events. And friends who, if it weren't for you, could have never gone on this extraordinary journey that I've gone on.

And it's interesting, Michelle and I, we're always reflecting on the nature of the work at the White House and—whoops. That's okay. You all right? Hope that didn't break. And we could not be more privileged to be able to serve the American people and couldn't be more grateful for the opportunity they've given us. And every day is just this remarkable adventure. But I will tell you, we're not shy about saying the one thing we miss is, we don't get to see our friends as much. And as I look around this room, it's a reminder that you guys do have our backs, have continued to have our backs, and we're grateful for you and couldn't be more appreciative of everything that you've done.

Now, I mentioned at a previous event, a friend of mine and a friend of some of yours, Ab Mikva, once said that having a friend who's a politician is like permanently having a child in college. *[Laughter]* And basically every few months a tuition check comes, and you keep on thinking, haven't they graduated yet? *[Laughter]* Golly. I'm still working—*[laughter]*—I want to remodel the kitchen and basement.

Here's the good news—is we're about to graduate. This is—this will be the last campaign. [Laughter] And you know, when you think about what's at stake, I hope you end up feeling that there hasn't been a more important investment to make than the one that needs to be made this year, not just in terms of money, but in terms of time and energy and effort and enthusiasm.

Back in 2008, when we first got started, I think we all had a shared vision, a common vision, of a country that came together to try to solve problems that had been put off for decades, whether it was fixing a health care system that was broken, making sure that our education system was functioning for this extraordinarily competitive 21st century, making sure that our foreign policy reflected the best of our values, dealing with energy in a way that was smart and intelligent and not only improved our economy, but also helped our environment and made sure that we could leave a planet for the next generation, an America that was inclusive and made sure that everybody had a chance to succeed.

And that vision that we had, there were specific policies attached to it, but what it really came down to was this belief in an America where everybody gets a fair shot, everybody does their fair share, everybody is playing by the same set of rules, that all of us are invested in hard work and responsibility, and we're all in it together. That we don't have a country in which some people are consigned to poverty because of circumstances, that if they're willing to work hard, they can do it, and we all have a responsibility to make that happen.

That's what 2008 was about, and that's what the excitement was about, and that was the essence of the "hope, change" message—was this belief that in America, it's just different from other countries in the sense that it's diverse and everybody has a stake.

And we didn't know at the time that we were going to go through the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. We didn't know that we were going to go through this extraordinary financial crisis. And so a lot of the last 3 years had been just dealing with emergencies.

And they've been dealt with. And sometimes it wasn't popular. Sometimes it was risky. But we've now had an auto industry that has come surging back. We have seen private sector job growth for 22 months in a row. We are seeing the return of manufacturing to America for 2 years in a row now, some of the strongest manufacturing growth in a decade.

And so there's reason to believe that we're now getting past the worst of what was a very difficult situation.

But what was important to me over these last 3 years was that we also didn't lose sight of the things that had gotten me into this race in the first place, that we still worked on some of those long-term challenges.

And so we fought for health care. Because unless we could honestly say that nobody in this country is going bankrupt because they get sick, unless we could say that if you're working hard and you're carrying out your responsibilities, you shouldn't have to worry about whether an insurance company drops you or whether as a young person getting started off in life, that you're going to have some assurance that you've got health care coverage, that we're not living up to that vision that got us—that got me into this race. And so we got it done.

The first bill I signed, a bill that said that we're going to have equal pay for equal work because I want my daughters treated the same way as my sons. We got that done.

Making sure that college was accessible. We made sure that we took \$60 billion that were going through banks as a pass-through for student loan programs, and we said, let's use that \$60 billion and expand Pell grants and make student loans more accessible so that millions of young people have opportunity all across the country.

And if we're going to deal seriously with energy, we've got to get started now, even though we still have an economic crisis—especially because we've got an economic crisis. So we doubled fuel efficiency standards on cars and on trucks. And we made sure that we didn't have any more regulations than were necessary to keep our air clean and our water clean, but we were going to enforce those laws to make sure that we're leaving a planet behind for our kids and grandkids that is at least as clean as the one that we inherited.

And we said that we're going to have to end this war in Iraq, and we did. And we said that there are certain values that we're not going to back off of, like making sure that if you want to serve this country that you love, you don't have to answer for who you love. And we ended "don't ask, don't tell."

And so there were just—there were a series of things that met a lot of resistance, lot of the lobbyists opposed, that at times caused controversy. But 3 years into it, we can honestly say that the vision that motivated me to run, the vision that motivated you to work so hard, that we've been true to that vision.

Now, we still have a lot more work to do. We've got a lot more unfinished business. I was mentioning at a previous event I was at—I had a forum this morning with CEOs, some from very large companies like Intel, some from medium-sized companies, some from very small companies. The common theme was they were all bringing jobs back from China and Mexico. They decided to relocate back in the United States.

Now they were making this not out of a charitable decision. [*Laughter*] They were making this decision because American workers continue to be the most productive in the world and their productivity has shot up even in the midst of this recession, that our research and our innovation remains unparalleled around the world. And they started figuring out, you know what, it might actually be cheaper for us and more productive for us to create jobs here in the United States.

The interesting thing, though, was—is that when you asked them what more can we do to encourage this trend, every one of them said we still have to have a better education system; we need to make an investment in that. Every one of them said we've got to make sure we've got the best infrastructure in the world, and we've been falling behind. Every one of them said that we've got to have a smart energy policy.

Every one of them said that we've got to maintain our primacy in research and science and technology. And that was gratifying, because I said, well, that's my agenda. [*Laughter*] That's what I've been fighting for. And that's what this year's debate is going to be about. It's going to be about not only consolidating the extraordinary achievements that we've been able to get done thanks to you over the last 3 years making sure that health care reform is implemented and financial regulatory reform is implemented and we don't have a rollback of our environmental protections. Those are all important things.

But what we're also going to be debating is are we going to pursue a vision that says our only way to compete in this world is to slash spending on education and slash spending on research and development and not upgrade our infrastructure and take away worker protections and just kind of see how we do in a race to the bottom. Or are we going to pursue a

vision that says we're going to continue to have the best scientists and universities, but we're also going to get down into K through 12 and community colleges and we're going to train our young people, and we're going to invest in human capital, and we're going to have the best infrastructure. And there's no conflict between environment and economics because we're going to continue to make sure that we're at the cutting edge on advanced vehicles and electric cars.

That vision of a future that is inclusive and forward looking, that's what we're fighting for. Now, we've still got a difficult economy, and that's why this is still going to be a close race. I've got to tell you that if we weren't coming out of this extraordinary recession, I think the American people would make their decision very quickly.

But we've gone through 3 tough years. And the other side has been able to just sit on the sidelines and say no to everything, not cooperate, and then simply try to point the finger and say that somehow this should have been fixed. And I understand that. That's politics. That's how Washington generally works. And so this is going to be a tough battle, and I'm going to need all of you just as much now, more now, than I needed you in 2008.

But the main message I've got is that if you guys are willing to invest the same kind of blood, sweat, and tears as we invested in 2008, I'm confident we're going to win. And the reason I'm confident is that common vision of ours is one that's shared all across the country. I rose to national prominence by a speech that said there is no red—there are no red States and no blue States; it was the United States of America. Now, sometimes people say, ah, well, you learned, didn't you? [*Laughter*] You go to Washington, and you'll find out.

But that's Washington. That's not America. And when I travel around the country—I don't care whether I'm going to a tiny town or a big city, I don't care whether I'm talking to Black people or White people or Latinos or Native Americans or Asian Americans. Wherever I go, I still hear and see on display that core decency and common sense and confidence in the future and belief in community that I was talking about way back when. Making that real, translating that into policy, getting it through Congress, signing these things into laws, that's tough. It's not easy.

But the animating spirit? That's still there. And I am just as determined as I ever was—more determined with all that I've seen over the last several years—more determined than ever to make sure that we've got a government that is reflective of those values. That's what we're fighting for.

And if you guys stand with me, if you guys have my back as you guys have had my back for all these years, I guarantee you that we are going to win this election. We will deliver for the American people. And I won't be back here in that house for another 5 years. [*Laughter*]

All right? Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9 p.m. at the residence of Stuart and Evonne Taylor. In his remarks, he referred to State Senator Heather Steans of Illinois; and former White House Counsel Abner J. Mikva. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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