

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks at an Obama Victory Fund 2012 Fundraiser in New York City
January 19, 2012

The President. Hello, New York! Hello, New York! Hello, Harlem! Ah, it is good to be here tonight!

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. All right.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Thank you. Thank you so much.

I want to begin by just thanking Ny for the incredible introduction and being such a great mom. And we're so proud of her. Thank you. I want to thank our emcee, Lin-Manuel Miranda. We appreciate you.

I want to thank the incredible performers this evening; one of my favorites, India Arie in the house. There she is. I love India.

And then to know that Reverend Al Green was here——

[At this point, the President sang.]

The President. "I"—*[applause]*—"so in love with you." *[Applause]*

You—those guys didn't think I would do it. I told you I was going to do it. *[Laughter]* The Sandman did not come out. I—now, don't worry, Rev, I cannot sing like you. But I did—I just wanted to show my appreciation. *[Laughter]*

I also want to acknowledge a couple of outstanding Members of Congress with us here today: Congressman Charlie Rangel and Congressman Jerry Nadler are in the house.

All right, you guys have a seat. I've got something to say.

Audience member. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you. No, thank you. Because I am here tonight not just because I need your help, I'm here because your country needs your help.

There was a reason why so many of you got involved in the campaign in 2008, worked your hearts out. And it wasn't because you thought it was going to be easy. When you decide to support somebody named Barack Hussein Obama for President, you're not doing it because you think it's a cakewalk. *[Laughter]*

You did it because you understood the campaign wasn't about me. It was about a vision that we shared for America. A vision that wasn't narrow and cramped. It wasn't an idea that in America you just look out for yourself and the most powerful among us can just play by their own rules. It was a vision that was big and compassionate and bold, and it said, in America, if you work hard, you've got a chance. You've got a chance to get ahead. Doesn't matter where you were born. It doesn't matter what you look like. It doesn't matter what your name is. If you're willing to work hard, if you've got some talent, some idea, if you're motivated, you can make it.

And it was a vision that said we're greater together than we are on our own, that when everybody gets a fair shot and everybody does their fair share and everybody's playing by the same set of rules, then we all do better. We all do better.

That's the vision we shared. That was the change we believed in. And we knew it wasn't going to come easy. We knew it wouldn't come quickly. We knew there would be resistance. We knew there would be setbacks. But because of what you did in 2008, we've started to see concrete examples of that change.

Think about it. Change is the first bill I signed into law that enshrines a very simple proposition: You get an equal day's pay for an equal's day work, because we want our daughters treated just as well as our sons. That's what change is.

Change is the decision we made to rescue the auto industry from collapse, even when there were folks saying no and wanted to let Detroit go bankrupt. And now, 1 million jobs were saved and local businesses have picked up again and GM is once again the largest auto company in the world. And we are seeing cars rolling off those assembly lines stamped with three proud words: Made in America.

Change is the decision we made to stop waiting for Congress to do something about our oil addiction and finally raised our fuel efficiency standards on our cars so that by the next decade, every car is going to be getting 55 miles per gallon. That will save you money. That will save our environment. It's good for our national security. That's what change is. We got that done.

Change was the fight that we had to stop sending \$60 billion in unnecessary subsidies to the banks in the student loan program, take that \$60 billion out, give it directly to the students so that millions of young people all across America are able to afford a college education. That's change.

Change is the health care reform bill that we passed after a century of trying that says, if you get sick in America, you will not go bankrupt. And we've already got 2½ million young people with health insurance who didn't have it and seniors getting help on their prescription drugs. And Americans won't be denied coverage because of preexisting conditions or insurance companies dropping them right when they need the care most. That's what change is.

Change is the fact that for the first time in our history, you don't have to hide who you love in order to serve this country that you love. "Don't ask, don't tell" is over. We don't believe in discrimination in this country. That's part of who we are. That's what change is.

And change is keeping one of the first promises I made in 2008. We ended the war in Iraq, and we brought our troops home. And in the meantime, we refocused our efforts on the terrorists who actually attacked us on 9/11. And thanks to the extraordinary men and women in our—in uniform and our intelligence agencies, Al Qaida is weaker than it's ever been and Usama bin Laden will never walk this Earth again. That's what change is.

Now, you guys have been paying attention. None of this has been easy. Some of it was risky. We were opposed by lobbyists and special interests. Millions of dollars were spent trying to maintain the status quo. And a lot of the things we did weren't always popular at the time, certainly not with the crowd in Washington.

But part of the reason we were able to get it done is because of you, because I knew that all across America your voices were still being heard. You guys were still knocking on doors.

You were making phone calls. You were rooting for us, because you understood that as hard as this was, it was consistent with the vision that we campaigned so hard to bring about.

You kept up the fight long after the election was over. And that should make you proud. And it should make you hopeful. It shouldn't make you complacent, it shouldn't make you satisfied, because everything we did over the last 3 years is now at stake in this election. The very core of what this country stands for, that idea that no matter who you are, you can make it, that idea that we're all in it together, the idea that if there's a child somewhere who's not getting a good education, that affects me, the idea that if there's a senior somewhere losing her home, that affects me, that idea is at stake in this election.

The crisis that struck in the months before I took office put more Americans out of work than any time since the Great Depression. We've got a chart that shows in the months right before I took office, 4 million jobs lost; the months right after I took office, another 4 million, before our economic policies had a chance to take effect.

We've been growing ever since. We've been adding jobs ever since. But this was a profound crisis. But it was also a culmination of a decade where middle class families fell further and further behind and more and more good jobs, manufacturing jobs left our shores. And suddenly, our prosperity was built on risky financial deals or homes we couldn't afford or everybody running up their credit cards. And we racked up greater and greater debt, and incomes fell, and wages flatlined, and the cost of everything from college to health care to food went through the roof.

These problems didn't happen overnight; we weren't going to solve them overnight. It's going to take more than a few years to meet the challenges that have been decades in the making. The American people understand that. What they don't understand is leaders who refuse to take action. They're sick and tired of watching people who are supposed to represent them put party ahead of country or the next election before the next generation.

President Kennedy had a—once said, after he took office, he said, the thing that surprised him most about Washington was that it was as bad as he had been saying it was. *[Laughter]* I can relate to that. *[Laughter]* You've got the top Republican in the Senate who said his top priority was beating me. *[Laughter]* That's his top priority.

My top priority is putting Americans back to work. My top priority is making sure our kids are getting a good education. My top priority is making sure that everybody has affordable, accessible health care.

His top priority is beating me. That shows you things aren't in—on the level. That's how you end up with the Republicans in Congress voting against proposals that they used to support.

You saw them in December all tied up in knots because we were proposing tax cuts for workers and small businesses, and they always said they were the party of tax cuts. Suddenly—*[laughter]*—didn't know what to do. Proposals to rebuild roads and bridges, that didn't used to be a Democratic issue. It used to be we understood building America was good for America—putting cops and teachers back to work, back in the classroom, back on the streets. They will fight with everything they have to protect tax cuts for me, for the wealthiest Americans, and then suddenly, they get confused when it comes to tax cuts for the middle class.

Now, maybe they thought this was smart political strategy. Maybe they thought it would advance Mitch McConnell's agenda to beat me. But it's not a strategy to create jobs. It's not a strategy to strengthen our middle class. It's not a strategy to help America succeed.

So we've got a choice this year. It's—we have not seen a choice this stark in years. I mean, even in 2008, the Republican nominee wasn't a climate change denier. [*Laughter*] He was in favor of immigration reform. He was opposed to torture. [*Laughter*]

The contrast this year could not be sharper. So the question is not whether people are still hurting; people are still hurting profoundly. A lot of folks out there still out of work looking for work. The question is, what do we do about it? The debate that we need to have in this election is about where do we go from here.

The Republicans in Congress, the candidates running for President, they've got a very specific idea about where they want to take this country. They want to reduce—[*laughter*]—they want to reduce the deficit by gutting our investments in education, by gutting our investments in research and technology, by letting our roads and our bridges and our airports deteriorate.

I've already signed a trillion dollars' worth of spending cuts, proposed even more. And I think it's time for us to reduce the deficit by asking those of us who are most fortunate to pay their fair share—to pay their fair share.

And by the way, let me just say this, because I've been hearing a lot of these Republicans talking about, oh, that's class warfare, and he just wants to redistribute and doesn't believe in work, and he's trying to create an entitlement society, and this and that and the other. Let me be absolutely clear: I should pay more taxes and folks in my income bracket should pay more taxes and certainly folks who are making billions of dollars should pay more taxes not because I want to take their money and just give it to somebody else. It's because we've got basic investments and basic functions that have to be carried out in this 21st century if we're going to be able to compete.

We're going to have to train our young people so that they can get the high-skilled jobs of the future. We're going to have to make sure that we've got the best broadband lines and the best infrastructure to move products and services. We're going to have to make sure that we have the basic science and technology research that allows us to stay on the cutting edge of innovation, because other countries are making these investments and they're catching up.

And if we are going to do all that without leaving a mountain of debt for our kids, while still maintaining the strongest military on Earth, while still making sure that Social Security and Medicare are there for future generations, that our seniors are protected, then all of us have to do our part.

That is—should not be a Democratic idea or a Republican idea. That should be an American idea. It's about responsibility. It's about taking responsibility for the country. And when all of us take responsibility, we all do better. That's the idea.

The Republicans in Congress and on the campaign trail, these guys running for President—[*laughter*]—want to—why do you laugh? They're—[*laughter*]—they're running for President. [*Laughter*] They are. And they want to take Medicare and make it a form of private insurance, of—so that seniors shop around with a voucher, even if it doesn't cover the costs of their medicine or their care.

Now, I think that we can lower the cost—we have to lower the cost of Medicare with reforms that still guarantee a dignified retirement for seniors, because they've earned it. These folks act like this is an entitlement that was unearned. Folks paid into this system. They worked hard to have some sense of security. Our reforms should reflect that.

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 they say, well, look, if—China lets you pay low wages, so they want to roll back our minimum wage or our right to collectively bargain. They say, well, if companies can pollute in some of these other countries, so they want to get rid of protections that ensure we have clean air and clean water.

Look, we should not have any more regulation than is required for the health and safety of the American people. Nobody likes redtape. Nobody likes bureaucracy. That's why I actually—I've reformed Government so that we initiated fewer regulations than the previous administration, with a lot more benefit, much lower costs relative to the benefits, looking to streamline Government. We're saving businesses billions of dollars in reduced paperwork. So we are not interested in regulation for regulation's sake. But I do not believe in this notion that we should have a race to the bottom. That shouldn't be what we're competing for.

We should be competing to win that race to the top. We should be competing to make our schools the best in the world. We should be competing to make sure that our workers have the best skills and the best training so they get the best pay. We should be making sure that college is within reach of everybody.

We should be in a race to give our businesses the best roads and airports. We should be in a race to support the scientists and the researchers that create the next clean-energy breakthrough or the medicine that might cure pernicious diseases. We should be in a race to make sure that the next generation of manufacturing doesn't take root in Asia or in Germany, but takes root in Detroit and in Pittsburgh and in Cleveland and in New York. I don't want this to be a nation that just buys and consumes and borrows. I want us to be known for building and selling all over the world.

And that's a race—this competition for middle class security, for advanced technology, for having the best workers in the world—this is a race I know we can win. But America is not going to win if we do the same things, if we respond to our economic challenges with the same old, tired "cut taxes for wealthy people, let companies do whatever they want even if it's harming other folks, and somehow prosperity is going to trickle down to everybody else."

Look, we tried that. [*Laughter*] I don't know if you remember, but we tried that. It never worked. It didn't work when it was tried in the decade before the Great Depression. It's not what led to the incredible boom in the fifties and the sixties that created the greatest middle class on Earth. It did not work back in 2001 and 2 and 3 and 4 and 5 and 6—[*laughter*—where we had the slowest job growth of any decade.

We can't go back to this brand of "you're-on-your-own" economics. I believe we've got a stake in everybody's success. If we can attract outstanding teachers by giving her the pay and the support and the training she deserves, she is going to educate the next Steve Jobs. And not only will we have whatever the next iPad is, but we'll also all see the economy grow.

If we provide faster Internet service to some rural business somewhere and now suddenly they have access to the entire global market, or some business right here in Harlem that's selling something that previously they could only sell in a few blocks and now they can sell it

anywhere, that means suddenly they can start hiring more workers. They've got customers now all over the world. Countries will do better—our whole country will do better.

This is not a Democratic idea or a Republican idea. Abraham Lincoln, first Republican President, he understood this, launched the transcontinental railroad, the National Academy of Scientists—or of Sciences, the first land-grant college, all while dealing with a civil war—a Republican.

Teddy Roosevelt called for a progressive income tax, because he understood that you can't pretend you're for equality of opportunity when you have huge inequality and you're not creating ladders for success for people—a Republican.

Dwight Eisenhower built the Interstate Highway System, invested in math and science education so we could compete in the race to space—Republican.

There were Republicans in Congress that supported FDR giving millions of returning heroes, including my grandfather, the chance to go college on the GI bill. That idea is as old as this country.

And you know, that idea, it's still there. That sense of common purpose, it's still there. We tapped into it in 2008, and it's still out there all across the country. I see it everywhere I go. It may not be in Washington, it may not be in Congress, but it's out there. You talk to folks on Main Streets, town halls, VFW halls, barbershops, they understand this. Our politics may be divided, but people understand we're all in this together. They understand that no matter who we are, we rise or fall as one nation and as one people.

And that's what's at stake right now. That's what this election is about.

Now, I know these have been 3 tough years. I know that some of the change folks wanted hasn't come as fast as people hoped for. I know that after all the stuff that has gone on in Washington, it's tempting sometimes to just say, you know what, it's not possible, the system's broken, we give up. That's tempting. But remember what I used to say in the last campaign. I said this—I repeated it over and over again: Real change, big change, it's hard. It takes time. It takes more than a single term. It takes more than a single President.

What it takes is ordinary citizens like you who just keep on fighting, keep pushing, keep inching the country closer and closer and closer to our ideals. That's how the greatest generation defeated fascism and yanked us out of a great depression and built the largest middle class in history. That's how young people from every background were able to suffer billy clubs and fire hoses to ensure that our children grew up in a country where your race is no barrier to what you can become.

I mean, change is hard, but we know it's possible. We've seen it. I've lived it. I've lived it. I've seen it.

And so, as we go into this election year, I want everybody to understand, yes, my hair is grayer, yes, we've got some dings and some dents, and yes, this financial crisis has been a wakeup call. But you know what, there is no other country that doesn't envy our position. They understand that this country is still that last, best hope. And they are counting—the world is counting and our fellow citizens are counting on us not giving up, not giving in to despair.

If you want to end the cynicism and the game-playing and the point-scoring and the sound bites that pass for politics these days, then you've got to send a message this year, starting right now, that you refuse to back down, that you will not give up, that you intend to keep hoping

and keep pushing and keep fighting just as hard as you did 4 years ago. You are going to keep believing in change.

And if you are willing to do that, if you are going to work just as hard, if you're able to generate that same passion and commitment, then I'll be there next to you. Because I've often said—I said in 2008, I'm not a perfect man. I'm not a perfect President. But I promise you that I've kept that promise I made to you in 2008: I would always tell you what I thought, I would always tell you where I stood, and I would wake up every single day fighting as hard as I can for you.

I am just as determined now as I was then. And if you are willing to stand alongside me, we will knock those obstacles out of the way. We will reach for that vision of America that we believe in in our hearts, and change will come. If you will work harder than you did last time, change will come.

If you keep on believing, we'll finish what we started in 2008. Change will come. If you fight with me and press on with me, I promise you change will come. And we will remind everybody just why it is that the United States of America is the greatest nation on Earth.

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:56 p.m. at the Apollo Theater. In his remarks, he referred to Obama for America organizer Ny Whittaker; entertainer Lin-Manuel Miranda; and 2008 Republican Presidential candidate Sen. John S. McCain.

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Locations: New York City.

Names: Arie Simpson, India; Green, Al; McCain, John S.; McConnell, A. Mitchell; Miranda, Lin-Manuel; Nadler, Jerrold L.; Rangel, Charles B.; Whittaker, Ny.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, repeal; Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Budget, Federal : Entitlement spending, reform; Budget, Federal : Government programs, spending reductions; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Strengthening efforts; Business and industry : Manufacturing industry :: Advanced manufacturing, promotion efforts; Civil rights : Wage equality; Communications : Broadband technology; Congress : Senate :: Minority leader; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Postsecondary education :: Career training and continuing education; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, elimination of subsidies to private providers; 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 : Restructuring and reform; 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 visits; Science and technology : Research and development; Taxation : Tax Code, reform; Taxation : Tax relief; Terrorism : Al Qaida terrorist group; Terrorism : Counterterrorism efforts; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts.

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