

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks at an Obama Victory Fund 2012 Fundraiser in Orlando, Florida
February 23, 2012

Thank you, everybody. Everybody, please have a seat. Have a seat. First of all, I just want to thank Vince and the whole family for setting up this unbelievable event. This is a nice gym. [Laughter] So Vince said that he left the other side open in case I wanted to get in a dunk contest with him. But I told him I didn't bring my sneakers, so not tonight. [Laughter]

But Vince has been so generous, along with his mom and the whole family, for the last couple of years. And it's a huge treat for me because I'm such a fan of his ever since he was playing for the Tar Heels. I know Reggie Love is not here, so I can praise the Tar Heels. [Laughter] But always conducting himself with such dignity and class and now doing such great work with the Mavericks. I know that Mark Cuban is pretty happy about having Vince around.

I see a lot of other friends in the room. Alonzo and Tracy have been there for me every time I've come to Florida. I could not be more grateful for that. Magic and Cookie, wherever I go in California, they're there for us. Chris is helping out on our Fitness Council and allowed me to cross over on him when we played during my birthday. [Laughter] He insists that he could have stolen the ball at any time. [Laughter] But I'm going to still claim it.

In addition, I want to make sure that I acknowledge, first of all, the mayor of Orlando, Buddy Dyer is here. An outstanding Senator for Florida, but also just a great Senator for the country, Bill Nelson is here. And I always have to remind people Bill was an astronaut before he was a Senator. So being a Senator is cool. Being an astronaut is cooler. [Laughter] And his lovely wife Grace, it's wonderful to see you.

And the chair of the Democratic National Committee, Debbie Wasserman Schultz is here. So we love Debbie.

I also understand that Commissioner Stern is here. And I just want to say that—thank you so much for settling the lockout. [Laughter] Because I don't know what I would be doing with myself if I didn't at least have some basketball games around. And obviously, we're looking forward to the All-Star Game. The game down in Miami is tight, by the way. I just—I was checking on the score as I was flying up.

We've gone through 3 of the toughest years this country has gone through in my lifetime. And there are a lot of people who are still hurting all across the country, a lot of people here in Florida, a lot of people everywhere. There are still folks whose homes are underwater because the housing market collapsed. There are people who are still struggling because they can't find a job. There are folks who are just barely able to make ends meet. And obviously, those of us who are here, we've been incredibly blessed. But one of the great things about America and one of the great things about those who are in professional sports is we've all got cousins, uncles, family members, who are still struggling and are a reminder that we have a lot more work to do.

The good news is that the country has begun to move in the right direction. So when I took office, we were losing 750,000 jobs a month; last month, we gained 250,000. We stabilized the financial system. We've now created 3.7 million jobs over the last 2 years. Businesses are starting to invest again. Consumer confidence is up. People are buying tickets to the games. And there's a general sense that we may have weathered the worst of the storm.

That's the good news. The challenge, though, is when I ran in 2008, it wasn't just to tread water, it wasn't just to avert a great depression and then get back to where we were in 2007 and 2008, because people were already struggling then. There were too many communities where if a child was born in poverty, they didn't have any ladders to get out, where middle class families were struggling to get by, even though now you had both mom and dad working and they still didn't have enough in their paychecks to be able to make ends meet.

A few people were doing very well. And what used to be the core of America's middle class felt like it was falling behind. And so as a consequence, even as we've made sure to do everything we can to dig ourselves out of this incredible hole that I inherited, even as we have strengthened the economy and focused like a laser on how do we put people back to work, we've also tried to say, how do we rebuild America in a way where everybody has got a fair shot, everybody is doing their fair share, everybody is playing by the same set of rules, everybody who is willing to take responsibility and work hard, they can get ahead? And that's been our challenge.

And so in addition to the stuff that we've done to make sure that folks are getting back to work, we've also said nobody should go bankrupt because they get sick in this country, and we were able to pass a health care bill that is already providing 2.5 million young people insurance who didn't have it before and, by the time it's fully implemented, will give 30 million people health insurance, the kind of security that we take for granted where if our child gets sick or a family member falls ill, that they know that they're going to be able to get well without having to lose their home.

That's why we focused on education, and we've said that not only do we want to improve K through 12 so that every child is getting the basics—math and science and English—but we want everybody to be able to go to college. And we took \$60 billion that was going to—that was being channeled to the banks as subsidies through the student loan program, and we said let's take that money and give it directly to students so that we could expand Pell grants and we could make sure that every—young people who want to go to college can afford to do so. Because right now, actually, student loan debt is higher than credit card debt in this country. And it's a huge burden on the next generation, and we have to start relieving it.

We said, we've got to have an energy policy that makes sense and that includes developing oil and gas resources in this country, but it also means focusing on clean energy. And here in Florida, we've seen enormous progress on things like solar and wind and biodiesel. But we've got to do more: making sure that our cars are more energy efficient, making sure that we're not prey to, every year right around this time, oil spiking because something is going on in the Middle East, and our whole economy is suddenly vulnerable.

And we focused on making sure that our tax system is fair. What I've said consistently is, look, I don't like paying taxes any more than anybody else does, and I'm the President. Now, here's the thing about being President, you pay every dime. You don't take advantage of any loopholes—*[laughter]*—because everybody sees your income tax returns. So I'm probably in the top bracket in every category.

But what I've said is Michelle and I have been so blessed, we can afford to do a little bit more to make sure that the next generation is able to come back up, is able to achieve their dreams the same way Michelle and I did. Because we think about our stories. I was raised by a single mom. Michelle was raised by a blue-collar worker and a secretary. My mother-in-law, even though she lives with us now, she's kept her home back in Chicago. It's now her house, but when they were growing up it was actually my mother-in-law's sister's house and Michelle's

family lived on the top floor, the second floor of this bungalow. It couldn't have been more than 600 square feet where four people grew up.

And yet she was able to go to a quality public school, go to Princeton, go to Harvard Law School, because somebody made an investment in her. Somebody said, you know what, we want to make sure everybody has opportunity. And that's the same way I was able to get ahead, is because somebody made an investment in me.

And so what I've said is, as President, we welcome success. We want somebody like a Vince Carter to be able to build a house like this. But we want to make sure that that next generation is able to do just as well because they're young people, just as—they might not have the same vertical as Vince—[*laughter*]. But they've got the same talents in something else, maybe in science, maybe in the arts, maybe in engineering, maybe they could be a doctor or a lawyer. And I don't want to pull up the ladder behind me. And I don't think anybody here does either.

And that's what's at stake in this election. What's at stake in this election is whether we as a country are going to continue to look out for one another and be able to say that it doesn't matter what you look like, where you come from, what your name is, that if you're willing to work hard, you can get ahead.

And that is an experience that is true for everybody in this room at some level. Somewhere in your past you had an immigrant mother or grandmother or great-grandmother or great-grandfather who came to this country with not much and was able to create a life for themselves. And in the debate that's going to be unfolding over the next several months, you seem to see a philosophy on the other side that says, basically, you know what, it's fine if a few of us do well and everybody else is struggling.

And that's not how America got built. That's not what makes America strong. The reason we were the envy of the world is because we had this massive middle class and you could get rich here in America, but there was also the possibility of everybody getting ahead.

I love looking at Magic's story, for example. His dad, when you talk about basketball, you learned your work ethic from your dad, right, working every day driving a truck, right? Well, you know what, that was a life of dignity and respect. You weren't a celebrity. You might not make millions of dollars, but you could raise a family and have a home and pass on to your son those same values.

And that's what we're fighting for here. That's the struggle. It has to do with our values and who we are as Americans. So the good news is as I travel around the country, most Americans agree with me.

One of the things about being President is when things are going tough everybody looks to you and says, why haven't you fixed it yet? And that's okay. That's what you sign up for. As Michelle always reminds me, you volunteered for this. [*Laughter*]

But no matter where I go around the country, whether it's in a big city or a rural community—north, south, east, west—I meet the most incredible people, and they still have confidence and optimism in America's possibilities. They get frustrated with Washington, but they still believe in what we can accomplish as a country when we work together.

And that's what we're going to continue to strive for over the next several months. And that's what we're going to continue to strive for over the next 5 years with your help.

So thank you very much, everybody, for being here. I appreciate it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9 p.m. at the residence of Vince Carter. In his remarks, he referred to Michelle Carter-Scott, mother of Vince Carter, guard-forward, and Mark Cuba, owner, National Basketball Association's Dallas Mavericks; former Personal Aide to the President Reginald L. Love; former NBA player Alonzo Mourning and his wife Tracy; former NBA player Earvin "Magic" Johnson, Jr., his wife Cookie, and his father Earvin, Sr.; Chris Paul, point guard, NBA's Los Angeles Clippers; and David J. Stern, commissioner, National Basketball Association. He also referred to his mother-in-law Marian Robinson. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Obama Victory Fund 2012 fundraisers :: Orlando, FL.

Locations: Orlando, FL.

Names: Carter, Vince; Carter-Scott, Michelle; Cuban, Mark; Dyer, John H. "Buddy"; Johnson, Cookie; Johnson, Earvin "Magic," Jr.; Johnson, Earvin, Sr.; Love, Reginald L.; Mourning, Alonzo; Mourning, Tracy; Nelson, C. William; Nelson, Grace C.; Obama, Michelle; Obama: Michelle; Paul, Chris; Robinson, Marian; Stern, David J.; Wasserman Schultz, Deborah.

Subjects: Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, elimination of subsidies to private providers; Elections : 2012 Presidential and congressional elections; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: Promotion efforts; Energy : Foreign sources; Energy : Fuel efficiency standards, strengthening efforts; Energy: Domestic sources; Florida : President's visit; Florida: Democratic Party events; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Immigration and naturalization : American "melting pot"; Sports : Basketball; Taxation : Tax Code, reform.

DCPD Number: DCPD201200124.