

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks at an Obama Victory Fund 2012 Fundraiser in New York City
March 1, 2012

Thank you. Wow, you are making me blush. *[Laughter]*

It is just wonderful to be here. And I want to thank Victor and Sarah for opening up their extraordinary home. Although, I will say they have some pictures of me before I had gray hair—*[laughter]*—which is a little troubling. They should have put the photo down. *[Laughter]* But it's a testimony to how long the two of them have been friends and supporters. And those of you who know them know the passion and the extraordinary energy that they bring to issues of social justice and democratic politics.

I'm grateful for all you being here. I'm going to keep my remarks at the top relatively brief so that we can have more of an exchange of ideas and I can answer questions and you guys can give me good advice.

But I'll tell you, obviously, we've gone through 3 of the toughest years that America has gone through in our lifetimes. And when I think back to those early months—at a time when we were losing 800,000 jobs a month and the banking sector had completely locked up and the auto industry was on the verge of liquidation here in the United States and globally no one was sure whether the center would hold—the thing that gave me confidence was the incredible resilience and energy and hopefulness that I had seen during my travels as a Presidential candidate. And so as scary as those moments were, I had confidence that America could bounce back.

Now, we're not all the way back. There is still a lot of hardship out there. There are a lot of folks who still are looking for a job, or if they're employed, are still just barely getting by. There are millions of Americans who have seen their homes decline in value and they're underwater, and they're wondering whether they're going to be able to retire as they had planned, or send their kid to college.

We still have an enormous amount of work to do. But the good news is that here in the United States, the trend lines are good. Last month, we saw 250,000 jobs created. We've created 3.7 million jobs over the last 2 years. We've seen the highest growth in manufacturing jobs since the 1990s. Unemployment is still high, but it's been moving in the right direction.

And across the country, what you're seeing are businesses small and large saying to themselves, you know what, investing in America makes sense, because for all of our challenges, there's still no country that other folks would rather be because they understand that there is something about this place, that there's a set of values that are core to who we are, that are woven into our DNA, that allow you to make it if you try.

Now the challenge is that for a lot of folks, that essential American Dream that brought a lot of our forebears here to the United States has been slipping away. And so even as we've tried to right the ship of the economy, even as we saved the auto industry, even as we stayed focused on putting people back to work, we were also looking at what are the fundamentals that ensure that everybody is going to get a fair shot, everybody is going to do their fair share, everybody is going to play by the same set of rules.

And that's why, over the last 3 years, we've focused on making sure that you don't go bankrupt if you get sick and that 30 million people will have health insurance that didn't have it before and insurance companies can't deny you coverage at a time when you need it most.

It's the reason we've put such an emphasis on education, not just through reform of the K-12 system, so every kid, no matter what their circumstances, can move ahead, but also, that once they graduate from high school, they can actually afford to go to college. And we've made a bigger commitment at the Federal level to education than any administration in recent history. And our basic argument has been, not only are we going to put more money in, but we're also going to reform the system and raise standards and infuse school districts with the kind of creativity and passion that's required to make sure that kids can learn.

It's the reason why, on the environmental front, we've doubled fuel efficiency standards on cars—so that we know that a decade from now your average vehicle will get 55 miles a gallon, which is part of the reason why we're starting to see our dependence on foreign oil decline—and having an energy policy that is not just drill, drill, drill, but is also investing in clean energy and advanced battery technologies and making sure that we're using energy more efficiently. That's going to be one of the foundations for making sure that we can succeed over the long term.

So in addition to just saving the economy, what we've been trying to do is make sure that we provide a better foundation for long-term economic growth. And we're poised to make that happen.

Of course, over the last 3 years, I haven't just been able to worry about what happened here in this country, we've also had to do a little bit of worrying about what happened around the world. The first promise I made as a Presidential candidate was that I would end the war in Iraq. Last night, I had the great honor of hosting a representative sample of the incredible young men and women, and some not so young men and women, in uniform who helped allow us to stabilize Iraq. And that war is now over.

We're in the process of transitioning in Afghanistan, so that, increasingly, Afghans can take a lead for their own security and we can start bringing our troops home. And we've been able to do all this while focusing attention on those who actually perpetrated 9/11. And Al Qaida is weaker than it's ever been, and bin Laden is no more. Which goes to show that there's no contradiction between having a smart foreign policy, a foreign policy that is consistent with our values, but also being tough and looking out for America's national security.

Now, just as there's a lot more work to do here in the United States, there's a lot more work that we have to do internationally. What's happening in the Middle East and North Africa right now is as profound, as transformative, as what happened when the Berlin Wall fell, and the jury is still out in terms of the direction that it will go. And my administration's commitment has been to say that we will continue to affirm our values, the things we believe in, that we will, where we can, defend people from brutality of their own governments, that we will stand up for human rights, we will stand up for free speech, we will stand up for women's rights. We will oppose torture. We will oppose the kind of oppressiveness that unfortunately had been too common in too many countries in that region.

And one of our long-term goals in that region is to make sure that the sacrosanct commitment that we make to Israel's security is not only a matter of providing them the military capabilities they need, not only providing the sort of qualitative military edge that they

need in a very tough neighborhood, but also that we are a partner with them to try to bring about a peace in the region that can be lasting. And that is a challenge.

What we're seeing around that region is, is it used to be easier just to deal with one person who was an autocrat when it came to knowing who you could strike a deal with. Part of what happens as a consequence of these regimes dissolving is that we're going to have to take into account the politics and the attitudes of people in this region. And that's going to be challenging because there have been years of venom and anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli rhetoric that had been floating around for a long time.

At the same time, one of the things that I'm absolutely convinced of is that for Israel's long-term security, it is going to be necessary for us—even as we draw sharp lines in terms of Israel's security—to also continue to reach out to people of good will on the other side and try to shape the kind of lasting, two-state solution that will allow Israel not only to preserve its security, but also to preserve its essence as a democratic, Jewish state.

And so as I look out over the next several years, America has probably had—never had a clearer choice about where we go next, because the other side has a very different vision across the board about who we are and what's important. On the domestic front, their basic vision is if a very few people at the top are doing well and everybody else is struggling to get by, that's okay. On the foreign policy side, their view is, is that as long as we are flexing our muscles militarily, the need for engagement and diplomacy is a sign of weakness rather than strength.

And so this election has huge consequences. And what I've been saying to folks as I travel around the country—a lot of supporters back in 2008—it was so much fun and so fresh to support this young guy who nobody could pronounce his name and there were those posters there and—there's a little bit of revisionist history. People remember that campaign as being flawless and so much fun. I don't remember it that way. *[Laughter]* I remember us screwing up all the time.

And so I acknowledge, yes, I've got a little more gray hair now. And the last 3 years, despite, I think, the extraordinary work that my team has done, that we've got some dings and some nicks and some cuts from the battles we've had to fight. But I am as determined as I ever was, and I believe as deeply as I ever have, about the core decency of the American people and the importance of a Government that reflects those values.

And that's what we're going to be fighting for over the next year. And I'm going to need your help. So I hope you're ready, and I hope you will be just as determined, just as fired up, just as ready to go as you were in 2008.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5 p.m. at the residence of Victor and Sarah Kovner. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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

Locations: New York City.

Names: Kovner, Sarah; Kovner, Victor.

Subjects: Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Business and industry : Domestic investment, promotion; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Education : Postsecondary education ::

Affordability; Education : Standards and school accountability; Elections : 2012 Presidential and congressional elections; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: Promotion efforts; Energy : Hybrid and alternative fuel automobiles :: Battery technology, U.S. production; Foreign policy, U.S. : Civil and human rights, promotion efforts; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Israel : Security cooperation with U.S.; Middle East : Arab-Israeli conflict, peace process; New York : Democratic Party events; New York : President's visits; Terrorism : Counterterrorism efforts.

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