

Remarks at an Obama Victory Fund 2012 Fundraiser

September 28, 2012

Thank you so much, everybody, for being here. Let me say thank you to Jay and Sharon who have just been extraordinary friends. This is probably the fourth or fifth event that I've had here, and they have been with me every step of the way. And as Jay points out, being the beloved Senator from West Virginia, where my vote totals don't always match my aspirations—[*laughter*—for Jay to have been such a great friend all these years means the world to me.

And Sharon, who does so much to keep Jay in line—[*laughter*—but also just a powerhouse in her own right, you guys have just both been extraordinary friends, and I'm very, very grateful. So give them a big round of applause.

I am so thankful to all of you. As I look around the room, I see people who have been with me since I was running for Senate and a lot of people in this space who supported me when nobody could pronounce my name. We've traveled a long road.

A friend of mine, Abner Mikva, used to say that being friends with a politician is like perpetually having a kid in college. [*Laughter*] Every few months you have to write a check. [*Laughter*] And it just keeps on going and going, and you're wondering when is it going to stop. The good news is, I'm about to graduate. [*Laughter*] This is about to be my last semester when it comes to political races. Obviously, we couldn't have come this far without your support and friendship, and I'm grateful for that.

We are in the midst of political season. My campaign manager, Jim Messina, tells a story from a couple of months ago. This is a true story. He was with a couple who—big supporters of mine. They had brought their 4-year-old son Sammy, and they were meeting with Jim and there was a picture of me. And they said, "Sammy, who's that?" And he said, "That's Barack Obama." And they said, "And what does Barack Obama do?" And Sammy thought about it for a second, and he says, "He approves this message." [*Laughter*] This is a true story. [*Laughter*]

And that gives you some indication that we are in political season. [*Laughter*] The message I approve is the one that Jay just delivered, which is that this is as important an election as we'll see in our lifetime. This to me is actually a more consequential election than 2008. Obviously, 4 years ago, something special happened during the campaign, and we had a whole bunch of tailwinds behind Democrats.

But between the Democrat and the Republican there was at least some sense of overlap in terms of how we viewed the world, right? John McCain was in favor of comprehensive immigration reform. He believed in climate change. He believed in campaign finance reform. There were differences, very profound differences, and yet there was still a sense, I think, that the differences between the parties could be bridged.

And I have to tell you, as I've been campaigning and as I've been President over the last 4 years, I continue to believe that the country is not as divided as our politics would indicate. But what's going on in this political campaign is not just a contest between two individuals or even two political parties. It really, at this point, is about two fundamentally different visions for where we take the country.

My opponent believes in the sort of top-down economic theories that, I think, got us into this mess in the first place. And when you look at his plans, the essence of it is massive tax cuts for folks who don't need them, even if it means cutting education investments by 20 percent, even if it means slashing our commitment to basic research and technology, even if it means turning Medicare into a voucher system. And then rolling back regulations that keep our air clean and our water clean and ensure that consumers aren't taken advantage of. And the notion is, is that if that happens, if government just gets out of the way, then jobs and prosperity will rain down on everybody.

And I've got a different vision. I deeply believe that America is built on individual initiative and risk-taking and entrepreneurship. And people are just putting in a lot of blood and sweat to build their lives. And as Lincoln said, we don't need government to do anything that we can do better ourselves. But I also think that our history has been one in which, when we are providing opportunity for everybody, regardless of what they look like or where they come from or what their last name is or who they love and that middle class is broad and deep and strong and people who are willing to work hard have ladders of opportunity into the middle class, when that happens, we are all better off. And that's what I've tried to do over the last 4 years, is stay focused on how do we create opportunity for everybody.

Now, we had a lot of work to do initially: saving an auto industry, making sure the banking system functioned, and making sure that we didn't fall into a great depression. But my job was not just to get us back to where we were in 2007, we had to tackle some issues that mattered over the long haul and problems that had been building up over decades.

And that's why we championed health care reform. We knew it wasn't going to be politically popular, but it was the right thing to do. That's the reason that we have emphasized having a Tax Code that encourages manufacturing in this country and makes sure that we're all doing our part in reducing the deficit. That's the reason why we've put such an emphasis on reforming our schools and also making sure that everybody who wants to go to college can afford it.

That's why, internationally, our emphasis has been to make sure that we're leading not just with the incredible military and the unbelievable men and women who are in uniform, who make sacrifices for us every single day, but that we give our military some help by having a diplomatic corps and a White House that is leading with our values and leading with our ideals.

And so, as a consequence, we've made great strides, but we've got a lot more work to do on that path to making sure that everybody has opportunity. And that's what this election is going to be about.

Now, we only have 39 days left, and I think that there is a tendency among Democrats to either think that the sky is falling—[laughter]—and that we are in the midst of utter disaster or everything is great—[laughter]—and let's start planning for the library 5 years from now. And I have to tell you that this is going to be a competitive race all the way down to the wire, precisely because there are a lot of people out there who are still hurting and who have legitimate questions about how are we going to get this economy growing as fast as we want and how are we going to bring back our deficit and how's my kid's life going to be better than mine.

And so we're going to have to work our hearts out over the next 39 days. The good news is that the message we're presenting, when it's actually stripped away of partisanship, when you just present to people, here are two contrasting ideas—and no labels are attached, these aren't

Obama's ideas or Romney's ideas, Democratic ideas or Republican ideas; these are just ideas for how we move the country forward—it turns out that people think our ideas are the right ones.

So if you ask folks, how important is education, they say nothing is more important. They know the world is getting more competitive and we've got to train our kids to compete. Well, how do we do that? My opponent has a philosophy that says we reduce our support and we rely on school vouchers and that's somehow going to move things forward and let young people borrow money from their parents to go to college and we'll be successful.

And we present an idea that says we're going to continue with Race to the Top to prompt reform and raise standards and hire new teachers in math and science and make sure that young people can afford to go to college by building on the work we've already done to make tuition more affordable and work with universities and colleges to reduce tuition. And lo and behold, it turns out they think that's the better way to go.

You talk to them about energy, and we try to explain: We've cut oil imports by the largest amount in the last 20 years. They're at the lowest point they've been in nearly two decades. But what we've said is we also want to end \$4 billion a year in subsidies to oil companies and instead use that money to continue to support wind and solar and biofuels and work to find the next technologies that can help us to gain greater fuel efficiency in our cars and put people back to work retrofitting our homes and our businesses so that they're more energy efficient—which idea do you think is better? They like our ideas.

If you talk to them about the Tax Code and you say, do you think it's fair that somebody making \$20 million a year pays a lower tax rate than somebody making \$50,000 a year, lo and behold, they don't think that's fair. And when you ask them should we reduce the deficit by cutting out things that we don't need, but also by making sure that our Tax Code is asking people like those of you in attendance here today to go back to the rates we had under Bill Clinton, they think that's a pretty good idea, particularly when they know that the alternative is gutting our commitment to the things that help us grow.

And when you talk about foreign policy and you say we ended the war in Iraq, we're going after terrorists, we're winding down the war in Afghanistan, and we're going to use the money that we save fighting the wars to do some nation-building here at home, Republican or Democrat, you get a cheer.

So we are well positioned; our ideas are right; our vision is one that is fact based, evidence based and that has actually a strong bipartisan tradition. But nevertheless, this is going to be a tough race. So I think my main message to all of you is I could not be prouder of the support you've already given me, but our work is not yet done. And I'm going to need all of you over the next 39 days to put as much into this thing as you can.

If everybody here has written all you can write when it comes to financial support, go find some friends. If you've got friends and neighbors in battleground States, call them up. Travel out there and knock on some doors. It's good for you. Those of you who've done it, you know. It's an adventure, but it's important, and it gives you some sense of what's at stake.

I don't want anybody to feel that somehow we're done 6 weeks out, because the American people are still hurting, and they want to know that their President is thinking about them every single day and fighting for this job because he is passionate about moving this country forward and passionate about advocating on their behalf. And so I hope that all of you feel that same determination that I do.

A lot of folks, as I do these photo lines, they say, thank you for serving. I know that having folks write \$10 million checks just to rain negative ads on top of you can't be fun, and we're so grateful, et cetera. And I have to remind them, as Michelle points out, I volunteered for this job. [Laughter] It is the greatest privilege that anybody could ever have. And when I think about the sacrifices that so many Americans make every single day and have made in the past to allow me to be part of this incredible democracy, it gets me inspired. It doesn't get me tired.

I go to Walter Reed every so often to talk to our wounded warriors. Most of these guys are 20, 21, 23, 25. They've got young families. The ones who've lost a leg are oftentimes the lucky ones. And yet despite everything that they go through and their families go through, when you talk to them, they couldn't be prouder of their service to this country. They love America so much, and they know what they're doing is important every single day.

And when I leave there, I'm reminded that we're all called to sacrifice in some fashion for this country, and we may not be able to match the sacrifices that they're making, but we better work hard. We better try. We better try to make sure that we've got an economy that works for everybody. We better try to preserve freedom for women to make their own health care choices. We better fight to make sure that the progress we've made on things like "don't ask, don't tell" don't get reversed. We better fight to make sure that we have real immigration reform, and some kid who's here, who's grown up here and pledging allegiance to our flag isn't suddenly deported from the only country they've ever know. We've got to fight for it.

And I've still got a lot of fight in me. So I hope you've got a lot of fight in you. Let's get to work. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:38 p.m. at the residence of Sharon and John D. "Jay" Rockefeller IV. In his remarks, he referred to former White House Counsel Abner J. Mikva; and Republican Presidential nominee W. Mitt Romney. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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Names: Clinton, William J.; McCain, John S., III; Messina, James A.; Mikva, Abner J.; Obama, Michelle; Rockefeller, John D. "Jay," IV; Rockefeller, Sharon; Romney, W. Mitt.

Subjects: Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, repeal; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Casualties; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Budget, Federal : Government programs, spending reductions; District of Columbia : Democratic Party events; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Education : Standards and school accountability; Education, Department of : Race to the Top Fund; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: Promotion efforts; Energy : Foreign sources; Energy : Oil and gas industry :: Subsidies, elimination; Foreign policy, U.S. : Diplomatic efforts, expansion; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Iraq : U.S. and coalition forces, withdrawal; Tax Code, reform; Taxation : Tax Code, reform.

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