

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

Remarks at a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Dinner in Dallas, Texas

July 9, 2014

Well, to the whole Stanley family, because we've got a whole crew here, I want to say thank you. Marc and Wendy have just been great friends for such a long time and great supporters not just to me, but of good causes here in Texas and all across the country, and we couldn't ask for better friends. And we're really thankful to all of them.

And Marc is entirely right to say that my greatest accomplishments as President had to do with having a great Speaker of the House, and I want her back with her hand on the gavel. She is tough, she is smart, and she has a heart as big as Texas, even though she's from California. *[Laughter]* Nancy Pelosi.

I want to spend most of the time in conversation, so I'm not going to make a long speech at the front end. Let me offer just a simple proposition. I'm not running for reelection. *[Laughter]* Not just because of the Constitution, but also because of my wife. *[Laughter]* And so I think I can say this not because I'm trying to get votes, but simply to state the facts. There's almost no economic measure by which we are not better off now than we were when I took office. And let me—just in case folks are wondering, let me just make sure everybody is clear. When I came into office, Nancy was Speaker, and we were facing the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Actually, the contraction was larger, we now know, than during the initial stages of the Great Depression.

And because of the incredible resilience of the American people, but because we made some smart decisions very early on, tough decisions, what we have now seen is 52 straight months of job growth, 10 million jobs created; unemployment rate is the lowest it has been since September of 2008, before I was elected. This first 6 months of the year, we've seen the fastest job growth since 1999. Manufacturing job growth, highest since the nineties. Deficit, been cut by more than half. The uninsurance—the number of uninsured has dropped because of the Affordable Care Act. Health care inflation is the slowest it's been in 50 years. Energy production has gone off the charts. We are now producing more oil than we import for the first time in a very long time. Solar power we've increased by 10 times, wind power by 3 times. We've reduced our carbon footprint faster than just about any industrialized country in the world. Our dropout rate has gone down; Latino dropout rate has been cut by more than half. College attendance rates are the highest they've ever been.

So on measure after measure—the auto industry comes surging back; we passed legislation that firms up the financial system, but also makes sure that if companies take excessive bets now, they're the ones left holding the tab instead of taxpayers. So by all outward appearances, we are indisputably better off than when I was elected, in part because we took some really tough decisions early.

But what's also true is, is that people are anxious out there. Part of it is still feeling traumatized by the crisis and the scale of it and people seeing their housing values plummet and the stock market taking a hit. And even though the stock market is at record highs now and housing has recovered, people still feel things are a little more fragile. And they had to go through a lot of deleveraging, getting rid of excess debt.

But a lot of it also just has to do with the fact that as things improve, a basic trend that's been going on for quite some time continues, which is wages, incomes of ordinary folks not going up even though productivity is going up, corporate profits are going up. The average person still feels, no matter how hard I work, I don't feel like I'm getting ahead the way I should, and I'm worried about the next generation and whether my child or grandchild is going to have the same opportunities that I have.

The good news is, we actually know what to do about it. We know that if we increase the minimum wage, millions of people would benefit. We know that if we pass equal pay for equal work legislation, that that's going to help not just women, it's going to help families, because when women succeed, America succeeds. We know that we've got \$2 trillion worth of deferred maintenance to our infrastructure. We could put people back to work all across the country—and those jobs can't be exported—rebuilding our roads and our bridges and our ports, our airports.

If we implemented a plan that's been sitting on the shelf for lack of funding, but is technically feasible right now, to redo our whole air traffic control system, we would reduce the fuel that airlines need by 30 percent, which, with corresponding benefits to the environment, those savings could then be passed on to customers. Delays at airports would be drastically reduced.

We know that early childhood education gives you a \$7 benefit for every dollar you invest and would also help alleviate the challenges of childcare. I was in Minnesota with a young woman who had written me a letter, just a wonderful woman. Her husband had lost a job in construction. He's a carpenter, worked for a railway at drastically reduced pay. She went back to school even though she had a small child, became an accountant. Together, they dug themselves out of debt. She's doing pretty well now, but she says, you know, I'm paying \$2,000 for my two little boys a month in childcare costs; there's no way we can get ahead. We could help her. We could help all these young people.

Yesterday, in Denver, a young person—a young woman, math major, what you want to see, excelling in school, but she's worried about the kind of debt she is accruing. There is legislation right now in the Senate and the House that would allow young people to be able to consolidate and refinance their debt, save themselves thousands of dollars. We know things that would work.

And there's one reason they're not happening. And that is, is that you've got a Republican Party right now, particularly House Republicans, whose only agenda seems to be to say no. They say no to minimum wage, they say no to fair pay, no to extending unemployment benefits and, so far, no to just renewing the Highway Trust Fund so people don't get laid off of the projects that are already going on. And of course, no to immigration reform.

So I enjoyed meeting with Governor Perry. And by the way, he had some suggestions that I said I actually agree with, which is why they're in the supplemental bill that I just sent to Congress. [Laughter] Why don't you get the Texas Republican delegation to pass it. Because the question is, are we interested in political gamesmanship, or are we actually trying to solve a problem? And the problem we have right now is, is that there's just a lot of political positioning, but there's a big, fat zero when it comes to action on the part of these folks to try to solve the problems that are on the minds of the American people right now.

Now, I always say, Democrats are not perfect. There are times where we've got our own ideological blind spots. There are times where we don't act as boldly as we should on issues

that are important, but tough politically. Everybody in Washington, they have to be reelected, and sometimes, it takes the public a while to get to places even when it's the right thing to do. And so Democrats aren't perfect. And by the way, my favorite President happened to be the first Republican President, a guy named Abraham Lincoln. *[Laughter]*

But right now, at this moment in our history, the reason we're not making progress is because you've got a party on the other side that has become so ideologically rigid, so invested in an economic theory that says if folks at the top do well and there are no regulations on banks or insurance companies or credit card companies or polluters, that somehow everybody does well. You've got a party that is so invested in obstruction than compromise and producing on behalf of the American people that truthfully this is not an issue of "a plague on both your houses."

Democrats are prepared to act on behalf of middle class families and their concerns. We're prepared to do hard things on behalf of that young woman who needs help on childcare and on behalf of that young woman who needs help on her college education. And we're willing to do some tough things on behalf of making sure that we have secure borders as well as making sure that we've got a smarter system of legal immigration and that we lift people out of the shadows who have lived here, oftentimes, for a very long time.

We're prepared to do tough things. And we'd love to have a partner on the other side. But we don't right now. And that means that the American people are going to have to call to question, and they're going to have to say to the other side, you know what, if you guys don't have a single idea to help us on anything and you can't compromise on anything, and the only thing you've produced during the 4 years that you've been in power is a Government shutdown and us coming to the brink of defaulting for the first time in 200 years and affecting the full faith and credit of the American people—if that's all you've got to offer, well, maybe you need to reflect for a while on why it is that you're in politics and what public service means.

So we've got one problem, and the problem is cynicism. The problem is, Democrats congenitally vote at lower rates during midterms because of gerrymandering—you know something about that here in Texas—and population distribution. Even though, on every issue, we enjoy a majority position, the House Republicans don't have to respond to that. They're responding to their primary Tea Party voters. Nothing happens, that makes our folks even more cynical, we're less likely to vote, and you get this vicious spiral where there's a lot of cynicism and a lot of unhappiness, but nothing changes.

And the reason I hope everybody is here today is because we actually can change that, but we can only change it if we feel some urgency about this midterm election. I want an effective, successful Republican Party. I want a loyal opposition. But the only way that the message is sent that you've got to do some commonsense things and act based on facts and reason as opposed to politics and ideology is if they have a sense that people are paying attention and that voters vote. And that's where the DCCC, it's got its work cut out for it, but it can do it because we're on the right side of this.

We've got to work hard. You've got to work not just—we don't have to just work as hard as we did during the Presidential election, we've got to work harder. And I know nobody is working harder than Nancy Pelosi. And I'm working hard. I need you all to work hard. And if you do, then we can deliver on behalf of all those folks who write me letters every single day, because they're good people, and they feel hopeful. But they need a little help, and I want to give it to them, and Nancy wants to give it to them, and I know you do too.

Thanks. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:40 p.m. at the residence of Marc R. and Wendy Stanley. In his remarks, he referred to St. Anthony, MN, resident Rebekah Erler, her husband Ben Erler, and their sons Jack and Henry; and Elizabeth Cooper, student, University of Northern Colorado. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee fundraisers :: Dallas, TX, dinner.

Locations: Dallas, TX.

Names: Cooper, Elizabeth; Erler, Ben; Erler, Henry; Erler, Jack; Erler, Rebekah; Obama, Michelle; Pelosi, Nancy; Perry, J. Richard; Stanley, Marc R.; Stanley, Wendy.

Subjects: Aviation : Air traffic control system, modernization; Budget, Federal : Appropriations :: Emergency supplemental; Civil rights : Wage equality; Congress : House of Representatives :: Minority leader; Democratic Party : Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee; Democratic Party : Democratic Party Events; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Early childhood education programs; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, interest rates and refinancing; Elections : 2014 congressional elections; Elections : Voter participation; Immigration and naturalization : Unaccompanied alien children across U.S. Southwest border, increase ; Labor issues : Minimum wage; Texas : Governor; Texas : President's visits; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts.

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