

Administration of Barack Obama, 2015

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser in Beverly Hills, California

June 18, 2015

The President. Hello, everybody! Hello! Hello, hello! Thank you. Everybody, please have a seat. Have a seat. I'm going to see a whole bunch of you and take pictures in a second.
[*Laughter*]

First of all, I just want to say that Tyler has got a lot of responsibilities, but I think one of the responsibilities we're going to add is to have him travel with me and introduce me everywhere I go. [*Laughter*] You know, he's got that nice voice and that soothing, authoritative manner, and I'm thinking that this will really work. [*Laughter*] So we'll work around your schedule. But thank you so much, Tyler, for your friendship and your grace and everything that you've done for so many people and being such a good role model for so many folks coming up.

Tyler's story is a singular story, but it's also a vindication of what's possible in America. And this idea sometimes that at times is betrayed, that at times we lose sight of, but this basic tenet that if you work hard and are serious about your responsibilities, that no matter where you start, no matter what you look like, where you come from, you can make it in America—I can't imagine anybody embodying that better than Mr. Tyler Perry. So we're really proud of him, really proud of him.

Plus, his baby is so cute! [*Laughter*] I was holding that baby and saying, my, my, my. [*Laughter*] That's a cute baby. Now, everybody's baby is somewhat cute. [*Laughter*] But objectively speaking, this is a really cute baby. So—got a cute mama—[*laughter*]—which make for—I know about that because I employed the same strategy, to improve your gene pool. [*Laughter*] But what a blessing.

And we were talking about how I remember holding Malia and Sasha like that and them drooling on my lapel. Oh, it's okay. Nobody noticed. There wasn't any milk in it, so—[*laughter*]. And then, they're 17, and they still love you, but don't find you that interesting. [*Laughter*] But that's part of the process.

Obviously, this is a challenging day for the country and for me and for the people of Charleston. I spoke earlier today and don't want to repeat myself, but the folks in that historic church were people I know. And Tyler talked about how he grew up in an AME church, so he knows what Wednesday Bible study is all about. He's been one of those 9 or 10 or 15 people studying Scripture and having fellowship and welcoming people and inviting them in to spread the Good News.

And to see such a horrific event unfold like that is particularly shocking. And it's a reminder that we've got a lot of work to do.

Tyler is right: When I came into office, we were going through the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. We were still in the midst of two wars. And I could not be prouder of the work that we have steadily done over the last 6½ years to pull us out of that hole.

By almost every economic measure, Americans are better off today than they were when I came into office. The unemployment rate has gone from 10 percent to 5.5 percent. People who had lost their savings in 401(k)s have seen them not just restored, but exceeding where they

were. The auto industry, which was flatlining with the potential loss of a million jobs, now is thriving, even stronger than it was before the crisis. Housing has begun to recover.

We produce more energy than ever before. We doubled the production of clean energy—wind power three times as much as when I came into office, solar 10 times as much—and as a consequence, we've actually been able to reduce our carbon emissions that cause climate change more than any other nation on Earth.

High school graduations are up. College attendance is up. Reading scores are up. Sixteen million people have health insurance that didn't have it before. The uninsured rate has never been lower in America.

We've done all this and cut the deficit by two-thirds. And so there's almost no measure by which one could argue that we have not made significant progress over these last 6½ years. But we've got so much work to do. There's so much that's left undone. We still live in a country in which the idea of equal opportunity is not felt, is not experienced, is not lived for too many young people. Too many in our middle class have seen their incomes and wages flatline even as their expenses go up. Too many young people are still priced out of college, and if they do go to college, are burdened with extraordinary debt.

[At this point, a baby screamed.]

Yes! *[Laughter]* I think your folks are going to be able to pay for your college, but there are a lot of people who won't—*[applause]*. Worried about it.

Too many of our young people see the path to prison much more clearly than they do the path to a college education. Too many of our kids still go hungry in this country.

I was looking at some statistics, because we're looking at policies around hunger and the SNAP program, and the performance of children in lower-income communities in school dips at the end of the month in a statistically significant way, in part because they start getting hungry as their food stamps for their family start running out which then affects how they perform in school.

There's so much to do to grow this economy in a way that's broad based. We could be investing in roads and bridges and airports and a new electric grid and put people to work right now and lay the foundation for growth for years to come. We should be investing more money in research and development to cure diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

We should be reforming our criminal justice system in such a way that we are not incarcerating nonviolent offenders in ways that renders them incapable of getting a job after they leave office—or after—*[laughter]*—little slip of the tongue there. *[Laughter]* Little Freudian slip. *[Laughter]* Tyler is going to give me a job once I leave. *[Laughter]* It is true—I think it was Bill Clinton who said—the White House is the crown jewel of the Federal penitentiary system. *[Laughter]*

And here's the thing. Here's the thing. On all these issues, we actually know what the solutions are. The problem is not the absence of proven strategies to increase opportunity. We know early childhood education works; that if it's well designed and you've got teachers who have been trained in early childhood development and you take low-income kids and you give them those opportunities, we know that they are going to perform better in school, that they're more likely to read at grade level when they enter into third grade, which means that they're less likely to drop out, which means they're less likely to get into the criminal justice system, which means they're more likely to graduate and attend college, which means they are more

likely to get a job, which means that they are more likely to be productive, taxpaying citizens. We know that. We know that a dollar we invest in that, we get \$7 back.

We know that infrastructure spurs on economic development and that our future depends on how we invest in research to keep at the cutting edge of technology in this knowledge-based economy. We know it.

We know immigration reform would not only bring millions of people out of the shadows that we could not practically or in good conscience deport and that they would then make contributions, they would pay taxes, it would actually reduce the deficit, increase entrepreneurship. We know that. It's one of our strengths as a country.

We know that our kids have to be able to afford a college education and that those States and cities and communities where they've got a well-educated workforce, that's where companies want to move to.

The problem is not that we don't know what works. The problem is, is that too often the political system doesn't reflect the common sense and decency of the American people.

I got a letter a while back from a gentleman living in Colorado and clearly an intelligent guy, and he had taken a lot of time to write this letter. And he said, you know, I voted for you twice, but I'm feeling disillusioned. And the good news—I get 10 letters a day out of the 40,000, and I read those 10 each night. And I've given strict instructions to the Correspondence Office, I do not just want the nice letters, and they have followed my instructions. *[Laughter]* And I get letters, people say, you are an idiot—*[laughter]*—and here's what you didn't do, and here's the program that is terrible, and all kinds of stuff. But this gentleman, he said, I voted for you twice, but I'm deeply disappointed. And it went on and on, chronicling all the things that hadn't gotten done.

And most of what he said I responded to, I think, pretty effectively—*[laughter]*—because he seemed to have forgotten everything that had happened and how he had benefited. But the core, I think, of his concern, the core of his complaint was that he thought that when I got to Washington I could bring people together and make them work more effectively. And the fact of the matter is, is that Washington is still gridlocked and still seems obsessed with the short term and the next election instead of the next generation.

And on that issue, I had to tell him, you're right. I am frustrated, and you have every right to be frustrated, because Congress doesn't work the way it should. Issues are left untended. Folks are more interested in scoring political points than getting things done, not because any individual Member of Congress is a bad person—there are a lot of good, well-meaning, hard-working people out there—but because the incentives that have been built into the system reward short term, reward a polarized politics, reward being simplistic instead of being true, reward division.

And as mightily as I have struggled against that, I told him, you're right. It still is broken. But I reminded him that when I ran in 2008, I, in fact, did not say I would fix it; I said we could fix it. I didn't say, yes, I can; I said—what?

Audience members. Yes, we can!

The President. Yes, we can. And so I said to him, if in fact you are dissatisfied, then writing a letter to me is nice, but I need you. If you're dissatisfied that every few months we have a mass shooting in this country, killing innocent people, then I need you to mobilize and organize

a constituency that says this is not normal and we are going to change it and put pressure to elect people who insist on that change.

If you're concerned about racial polarization in this country, it's nice to have dialogues around race, but me making a good speech—and I've made some good speeches on the subject—[laughter]—that's not going to solve the problem. What are you doing to reach out in your own community to make sure that that child who does not look like your child has the same opportunities that your child does? How are you voting when a referendum comes up about an early childhood education program? A program to encourage college attendance? What kind of mentorship are you involved with?

If you don't think that we've done enough to deal with climate change, what are you willing to give up to make sure that we have a breathable, functioning planet for our children and our grandchildren?

Sometimes, I feel like people forgot the essence of my pledge when I ran for President. What I promised—I said to people, I said, I am not a perfect man, I will not be a perfect President, but I promise you I will wake up every single day and I will go to bed every single night thinking about how to make sure that ordinary Americans have a chance. And I will fight as hard as I can, and I'll be as honest and straightforward as I can about what I believe can open up the doors of opportunity to everybody. That pledge I've kept.

But what I also said was that the most important office in a democracy is the office of citizen. And that's true for the President of the United States, but that will be just as true for me when I leave this office. And it's true for all of you.

And I raise this because you being part of this even is, part of the process of breaking out of what is a comfortable cynicism that we too often fall back on, and we just say, oh, that place, Washington, doesn't work, and everybody is dysfunctional, or that side of the aisle is crazy. And then we just throw up our hands and give up. We can't afford that, because we've got more work to do.

So part of what I hope you leave here with is not just a cool picture with me—[laughter]—because I look out in the crowd, a lot of you already have pictures with me. [Laughter] But I hope what you leave with is that sense that the unfinished business we've got does not just depend on me, does not just depend on the next President we elect, does not just depend on any particular Member of Congress. It depends on you.

And in these final 18 months, one of my biggest messages is that if we want the change we believe in, then we're going to have to work harder than ever in our own communities and in our own places of worship and in our own workplaces and reflect those values and ideals and then push this society and ultimately push Congress in the direction of change.

The good news is, we can do it. When I stood at the Edmund Pettus Bridge with John Lewis to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the march there, I reminded people of the fact that change is never easy. It takes decades of work sometimes just to make a little bit of progress. Sometimes, it takes a century to make a little bit of progress. But because somebody took on that work, successive generations took on that work, America is better than it was.

And so now we receive the baton and we run our race, and then we've got to hand it off to that beautiful baby of Tyler's and that beautiful baby right behind Tyler right now. And if we keep that faith and fight off cynicism, then 20 years from now, 50 years from now, 100 years from now, people are going to say, okay, they ran the good race, and we're further along, and

America is better and more just, and opportunity is more real for more people. And that's why we do what we do. That's the only reason to do it.

Thank you for being part of that process. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:31 p.m. at the residence of Tyler Perry. In his remarks, he referred to Aman T. Bekele-Perry, son, and Gelila Bekele, girlfriend, of Mr. Perry. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Democratic National Committee fundraisers :: Beverly Hills, CA.

Locations: Beverly Hills, CA.

Names: Bekele, Gelila; Bekele-Perry, Aman T.; Bekele-Perry, Aman Tyler; Clinton, William J.; Lewis, John R.; Obama, Malia; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Perry, Tyler.

Subjects: Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; California : President's visits; California: Democratic Party events; Civil rights : Civil rights movement; Civil rights : Minorities :: Minority rights and ethnic tolerance; Civil rights : Racial equality; Congress : Bipartisanship; Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Early childhood education programs; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Education : Postsecondary education :: College opportunity, expansion efforts; Education : Teachers; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment rate; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: U.S. production; Energy : Solar and wind energy; Environment : Climate change; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Law enforcement and crime : Criminal justice system, reform efforts; Law enforcement and crime : Gun control; Science and technology : Research and development; South Carolina : Charleston :: Shootings; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts.

DCPD Number: DCPD201500440.