

Administration of Barack Obama, 2016

Remarks at a Fundraiser for Senatorial Candidate L. Tammy Duckworth in Chicago, Illinois

October 9, 2016

The President. Hello, Chicago! It's good to be home. Welcome to the South Side. South Side! And it is always good to be friends—to be with friends with so many people here who, as I look out across the room, have been there from the start, have been there from the beginning. And so Michelle wants me to say hello. She loves you. It was great to be in our house, sleeping in our own bed. We were a little disoriented because the Cubs look like they might win the World Series. I noticed a bunch of my staff headed towards the North Side pretty early last night.

Hurricane Matthew

Before I get started, I just want to mention—because sometimes things get lost in the swirl—we all know that there's been a really serious hurricane down in Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia. People were hit. They weren't hit as directly as we had feared, but it has left a lot of devastation in its wake. Lives have been lost. Property has been severely damaged. And there's still continuing risk of flooding going on.

I've been in touch with the Governors of the affected States, and my team has been working to make sure that they're getting the resources that they need from the Federal Government. And even as TV cameras move on to the next story, we're going to be right where—with the people in need, to make sure that they're getting all the help they deserve. So for the folks in Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia: The American people are with you in this time of need, and we're just going to keep on working to make sure that as the waters recede, that you're able to rebuild. And we're going to do everything that we have to do to make sure that we've got your back.

2016 Presidential and Congressional Elections

Now, before I do anything else, I also want to thank the hosts of this evening. First of all, John and Bonnie Atkinson, thank you. Marty Nesbitt and Anita Blanchard, thank you. And, Theaster Gates, thank you for your incredible hospitality and this great facility.

A couple other people I want to acknowledge. Dick Durbin in the house. Congresswoman Cheri Bustos is here. Robin Kelly is here. We love Robin. Tammy Duckworth, I'm going to talk a lot about her later. *[Laughter]* Just a couple other people I see in the audience. Running Statewide, Susana Mendoza, is here. Where's Susana? We served together. She was in the House; I was in the Senate. And, of course, the ageless secretary of state, Jesse White, in the house. And when I was a senator, my State representative, Barbara Flynn Currie. I'm sure I missed a couple of people. It's not because I don't love you. It's because I'm getting old and it's dark here, so I can't see everything. *[Laughter]*

You may have noticed that when I got here on Friday, I was doing an event for the D-triple-C, and then I thought it would be a good time to just go ahead and vote. I'm not going to tell you who I voted for. It's private. *[Laughter]* You can probably guess. But here in Illinois, we're luckier than most. We don't just have one extraordinary candidate, we've got two

extraordinary candidates at the top of the ballot. And I'm proud to call them both friends. Our next President, Hillary Clinton, and our next Senator, Tammy Duckworth!

And I've had the pleasure of knowing Tammy for a long time. I could not be happier that she's running for my old Senate seat, because I loved being your Senator; it was a great job. I got to spend time traveling across this great State: small towns, farmlands, the world's greatest city. And what I always explain to people is, Illinois is a microcosm of the country. More representative than any other State of the broad diversity of America. It's a place where Democrats and Republicans and Independents and people of good will of all races and faiths share certain bedrock values. If you rank 50 States across the categories of age and education, household income, race, religion, then the Land of Lincoln is the best mirror for who we are.

And I also learned that if you're willing to listen, it's possible to bridge a lot of differences. I learned that most folks know that issues are complicated and they're not solved by sound bites; that there's a need for both idealism and practicality; that you have to be able to be bold, but not reckless, and take responsibility. We know what can and cannot be compromised and even admit occasionally that the other side has a point.

And that's what convinced me in part to run nationally, because I believed that if you could take some of that wisdom and apply it to our national politics——

[At this point, a cellular phone rang.]

The President. Uh-oh. Is somebody calling? *[Laughter]* That's so embarrassing. *[Laughter]* That's all right. Where was I? *[Laughter]*

The notion was, is that if we could apply that same common sense and that same sensibility, the belief that we're all in this together—that we're not enemies, we're on the same team; we have differences, but those differences should and can and must be bridged—if we can apply that at the national level, then it would make an enormous difference. That's what led me to run for President. That's the vision that's guided me as your President. And I'm here to tell you that that's the vision that Tammy Duckworth shares. That's why all of you have to do everything you can to make sure that we send this outstanding Member of Congress to the United States Senate.

Look, all of you know Tammy's amazing story. She's the daughter of a veteran and the daughter of an immigrant. She was a war hero who lost both of her legs when a rocket-propelled grenade struck the Black Hawk helicopter that she was piloting in Iraq. But she never stopped serving her country after she got home. She is a tireless advocate on behalf of her fellow veterans. She's a working mom, a champion for the middle class. She's a tough lady, but with a big heart. And she is going to be a great Senator for Illinois.

I cannot think of a better person to represent this State that I love. And I know that it's a cliché to say that every 4 years, that this is the most important election in your lifetimes. This is the most important election though. *[Laughter]*

Think about where we came from and the road that we've traveled. Eight years ago, we were spiraling into the worst financial crisis and economic crisis the world had seen since the Great Depression, in the midst of two wars. Regard for the United States around the world was sinking precipitously. And together, we fought our way back: cutting unemployment in half; helping our businesses create more than 15 million new jobs; slashing our dependence on foreign oil; doubling our production of renewable energy; reducing the deficit by almost two-thirds; getting income rising again, poverty falling again; covering another 20 million Americans

with health insurance so that we're cutting our uninsured rate to an alltime low. Bin Laden is gone. Marriage equality is a reality from coast to coast.

The work that we've been able to produce, even with all the obstruction, has been remarkable. But I'm telling you right now, all that progress is at stake in this election. We should be building on that success and creating even more progress. But if we don't do our jobs in this election, it could all be wiped away.

So we've got to elect leaders who are going to keep building an economy that works for everybody, not just for those at the top, but for folks at the bottom who are struggling to get into the middle class, and a middle class that's been hard pressed and is just now starting to see their wages and incomes grow. That's what Tammy believes in: an America that says, no matter who you are, where you come from, what you look like, what kind of disability you may have, what faith you are—if you work hard, you should be able to get ahead here in the United States of America.

So when it comes to students, Tammy and I have a plan to make community college tuition free, if you're willing to work for it. She's fighting to help people refinance student—their student loans, expand Pell grants, make sure that there's not a striving young student out there that feels that finances are preventing them from being able to achieve their dreams.

When it comes to veterans, I don't have to tell you Tammy is a passionate advocate with a record to match, because she knows what it means for our veterans to have the kinds of services that they have earned and the way that they can serve America even after they've put away the uniform. That's why I chose her to serve as my Assistant Secretary of the VA, where she helped to cut homeless veteran—the number of homeless veterans in half. In Congress, she worked to put more vets back to work, to protect servicemembers from predatory lending. And with Tammy by my side, I was proud to sign the Clay Hunt SAV Act to improve mental health care for our returning heroes. That is saving lives right now, and that's because of Tammy.

When it comes to seniors, Tammy has got a plan to make sure that Social Security benefits keep up with the cost of living. She'll pay for it in a responsible way by closing tax loopholes that benefit folks who, frankly, don't need another tax loophole. She's going to work to make sure that all Americans can enjoy security in their retirement.

And when it comes to improving relations between law enforcement and communities they serve—something that obviously is of great importance here—Tammy is working for comprehensive criminal justice reform that will make a difference. Everything from funding body cameras for cops to forgiving the loans of law graduates who serve their communities as prosecutors or public defenders. And she's going to invest in creating more jobs and opportunities for all of our young people. And I'm going to be working alongside her even after I'm finished being President to make sure that we're bringing those opportunities to all of Chicago, because our young people deserve it.

So that's what Tammy believes in. Don't let anybody tell you there's not a clear choice in this election. Tammy's opponent said no to free community college. He said no to allowing students to refinance their student loans. He's been silent on expanding overtime pay for hard-working Americans. Now, he has said "yes," but it was to turning Medicare into a voucher program. So that's the wrong answer. You should be saying no to that. His plan for the economy gives more tax cuts to the wealthiest among us and to companies that are shipping jobs overseas, while slashing investments in education, health care, infrastructure—all the

things that would help us have a broad-based growth economy. Do you really think that he'd be a check on somebody like the guy running for President at the top of the Republican ticket? That he would be saying "no" to him? Are we really going to risk giving Donald Trump the majority he needs to roll back all the progress that we've made over the last 8 years? I don't think so.

Audience members. No!

The President. No. [*Laughter*]

One of the most disturbing things about this election is just the unbelievable rhetoric coming at the top of the Republican ticket. I don't need to repeat it there are children in the room. [*Laughter*] But demeaning women, degrading women, but also minorities, immigrants, people of other faiths; mocking the disabled; insulting our troops, insulting our veterans.

That tells you a couple things. It tells you that he's insecure enough that he pumps himself up by putting other people down. [*Laughter*] Not a character trait that I would advise for somebody in the Oval Office. [*Laughter*] It tells you that he doesn't care much about the basic values that we try to impart to our kids. It tells you he'd be careless with the civility and the respect that a real, vibrant democracy requires. And it sure as heck tells you he's never met somebody as tough or smart or patriotic as Tammy Duckworth. If you want to see leadership, that's the kind of leadership that you've got to look for.

So the bottom line is this: If you want to send a message in this election, then you've got to vote for Hillary Clinton, and you've got to vote for Tammy Duckworth. If you want leaders who actually respect Americans and value hard work; if you want higher wages, better benefits, a fairer Tax Code, a bigger voice for workers, equal pay for equal work, stronger regulations on Wall Street—then you should vote for Hillary Clinton and Tammy Duckworth.

If you want a better kind of politics for our Nation; if you want common sense and a commitment to facts and reason and a belief that here in America, we're stronger together—then you've got to vote for Hillary Clinton, and you have to vote for Tammy Duckworth.

And all of that is going to require you. You're going to have to work. You can't take it for granted. Too much is at stake to get lazy or take it for granted right now. We've got to hustle. We've got to work. We've got to fight for it. So I'm asking all of you to join me. I'm asking all of you to work your hearts out. It's only 30 days. Work hard. Get out there. But if you're willing to work hard with me, with Michelle—and by the way, if you don't work hard, Michelle might, you know—[*laughter*—you don't want to mess up with Michelle, I know. If you're willing to do this for me, then I am absolutely confident that not only are we going to win an election, but more importantly, we're going to send a message to our kids about who we are. We're going to reaffirm what this country is about.

Look, one thing I've learned over the last 8 years is, a lot of problems are hard, and progress is rarely overnight, even in the great victories that we've had, like passing health care legislation that is improving the lives and saving lives of people right now. It's a grind. And you've got to battle it out. And whatever policies you put in place, they're not going to be absolutely perfect, and then you've got to tweak them and continue to work to expand and make them work even better. When you look at issues like climate change, you know that there's going to be—for every two steps forward that we take, there are going to be some folks who want to block progress. There's too much money in politics. We know that the lobbyists and special interests are still going to be having a big impact out there.

So democracy is not easy. It requires citizens who believe deeply that this form of government, the idea that we all have a voice and that we listen to each other and engage each other and we argue, but we don't demonize each other—that out of that process comes something better—it requires work; it requires commitment. It's the kind of service that Tammy Duckworth understands. She's made the kinds of sacrifices that most of us can't imagine. And the kinds of sacrifices she and her family are now making aren't as obvious, but they're just as meaningful, because ultimately, what she does is to show us what real patriotism means. She's showing us what true love of country means.

And for her to succeed, for Hillary to succeed, it's not enough just to mark a ballot box, although that's important. We're going to have to make sure that we've got their back every step of the way. And I can tell you, this has been the honor of my life serving as President. I am very much looking forward to life as a private citizen. [*Laughter*] But I will still be a citizen, and I will still have obligations. And I am going to be working just as hard, after a sizeable break and a lot of sleep—[*laughter*—to make sure that we leave to the next generation the same kind of incredible inheritance that we received from our parents and our grandparents.

So let's get busy, everybody. Are you fired up?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. Are you ready to go? Thank you, Chicago. I love you. Thank you, Tammy Duckworth!

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:58 p.m. at the Stony Island Arts Bank. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Nathan J. Deal of Georgia; Gov. Nikki Randhawa Haley of South Carolina; Gov. Patrick L. McCrory of North Carolina; and Gov. Richard L. Scott of Florida; John Atkinson, executive vice president and managing partner, Willis Towers Watson, PLC, and his wife Bonnie; Martin H. Nesbitt, cofounder and co-chief executive officer, Vistria Group, LLC; Anita K. Blanchard, professor of obstetrics and gynecology, University of Chicago Medicine; artist Theaster Gates; Sen. Mark S. Kirk; Chicago City Clerk Susana A. Mendoza, in her capacity as a candidate for Illinois State Comptroller; Illinois State Rep. Barbara Flynn Currie; and Lamai Duckworth, mother of Rep. L. Tammy Duckworth.

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Locations: Chicago, IL.

Names: Atkinson, Bonnie; Atkinson, John; Blanchard, Anita K.; Bustos, Cheri; Clinton, Hillary Rodham; Currie, Barbara Flynn; Deal, Nathan J.; Duckworth, L. Tammy; Duckworth, Lamai; Durbin, Richard J.; Gates, Theaster; Haley, Nikki Randhawa; Kelly, Robin L.; Kirk, Mark S.; McCrory, Patrick L.; Mendoza, Susana A.; Nesbitt, Martin H.; Obama, Michelle; Scott, Richard L.; Trump, Donald J.; White, Jesse.

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Insurance coverage and access to providers; Illinois : Democratic Party events; Illinois : President's visits; Law enforcement and crime : Criminal justice system, reform efforts; Natural disasters : Hurricane Matthew; North Carolina : Governor; North Carolina : Hurricane Matthew, damage and recovery efforts; Social Security and retirement : Social Security program; South Carolina : Governor; South Carolina : Hurricane Matthew, damage and recovery efforts; Sports : Baseball; Taxation : Tax Code, reform; Veterans : Benefits; Veterans : Health and medical care; Veterans : Hiring incentives; Veterans : Homelessness; Veterans : Service and dedication.

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