

Administration of Barack Obama, 2016

Remarks at a Fundraiser for Senatorial Candidate Theodore Strickland in Columbus, Ohio

October 13, 2016

The President. Hello, Ohio! Hello, Democrats! O–H!

Audience members. I–O!

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Audience members. I–O!

The President. Oh, it is good to see you all! Thank you. I'm just warming you up. [Laughter] Because I know the Buckeyes have a big showdown at Wisconsin on Saturday night.

Thank you so much, everybody. Please have a seat. I have—I'm going to talk to you for a while, now. [Laughter] Tonight we're here to talk about the showdown that's happening right here in Ohio over the next few weeks. And of course, it would not be an Ohio Democratic Party State Dinner without your former Governor and your next United States Senator, Ted Strickland. Love this man. Your current Senator, who is fighting for you every single day, Sherrod Brown. A couple of your outstanding Members of Congress, Joyce Beatty and Tim Ryan.

Now, I know the Ohio Democratic Party has been preparing for this election. You know a strong party depends on great public servants being elected at the local level and the school boards and the city councils and the mayor's office. And your field operation has helped us win important races from Akron to Toledo, from Chillicothe to Warren. And through the spring, even as we Democrats had a hard-fought primary, you kept signing up thousands of volunteers, registering thousands of voters, organizing on campuses all across the State. You were already looking to the fall campaign. So we are going to benefit big time from the infrastructure that you've already got in place.

So I just want to say thank you for giving us the edge that we need. Thanks for organizing. Thanks for mobilizing. Thanks for not getting tired. Thanks for still being fired up and still being ready to go. Because right now is when the fruits of all that labor are going to start paying off. It is game time. Kickoff was yesterday. Early voting started yesterday. The game does not start on November 8, the game ends on November 8.

So, everybody here, enjoy your dinner. [Laughter] Everybody looks cute. [Laughter] But tomorrow you've got to put on those walking shoes. You've got to start making those calls and knocking on doors, getting everybody out to vote early. That's how we won in 2008. That's how we're going to win in 2016.

Because, let's face it, let's face it, Ohio is always close. I don't know what it is about you guys. [Laughter] Just making me stressed. I've always got to watch the TV—what's going to happen in Ohio? [Laughter] I mean, I pretty much parked here in the final days of both of my campaigns. In 2008, I was here in Columbus 2 days before election day. In 2012, I was here the

day before election day. And it makes me think about how far we've come together, not just the fact that I had no gray hair in those pictures. *[Laughter]*

Think about the road we've traveled. Together, we fought our way back from the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Our businesses have now turned job losses into 15 million new jobs. We turned around an auto industry that Ohio communities depend on, and our automakers are making the best cars in the world and they are selling more than ever, thanks to outstanding UAW workers who take great pride in what they do.

We slashed our dependence on foreign oil. Folks don't even notice gas prices being cheap anymore. *[Laughter]* We more than doubled our production of renewable energy. We've got incomes rising again, rose faster last year than any time on record, all demographic groups. Poverty fell last year by the largest amount since 1968, since I was 7 years old. The uninsured rate is at an alltime low; 20 million people have health insurance that didn't have it before, including folks right here in the great State Ohio.

We brought more of our brave troops home to their families. We delivered justice to bin Laden. And in today's America, wherever you live, you can marry whoever you love.

We've been busy. *[Laughter]* We brought about change that's made a difference in the lives of people all across this country. There's almost no economic measure by which we are not substantially better off today than we were when I came into office.

That's what the hard work and the determination of the American people can do. That's what strong, principled Democratic leadership can do. That's what a President who has your back and is listening to you and cares about you can do. And that's what great Members of Congress and a Democratic majority in Congress can do. And that's why we've got to elect Hillary Clinton as the next President of the United States. That's why we've got to elect Ted Strickland to be the next great Senator from Ohio.

I will not be on the ballot, but everything we've done is going to be on the ballot.

[At this point, there was a disruption in the audience.]

Oh, Lord, what's going on now? Who's hollering? I can't even see you. Well, it's great to see you, but I've got all these folks I've got to talk to. *[Laughter]* Maybe you can get me a note. *[Laughter]* Write me a letter, all right?

[The disruption continued.]

Okay, I've got you. Okay, thank you. *[Laughter]* I can't hear you that well. I promise you this will go better if you talk to one of my staff up there. I've got you, okay. All right. Thank you.

Audience member. No more pipeline! *[Inaudible]* No more Dakota Access Pipeline!

The President. Okay, I've heard you. Let me now talk to everybody else. Thank you. I love you. All right. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. I mean, I'm getting old so I can't hear that well—*[laughter]*—I can't see that good. *[Laughter]*

[The disruption continued.]

I've got you. *[Laughter]*

Where was I? [Laughter] All right. So look, I'm not going to be on the ballot, but all the progress that we've made, all that stuff goes out the window if we don't work as hard as we can to win this election. And I've seen what hard work looks like here in Ohio. I've seen it. I've benefited from it. I got elected by it. And now Hillary and Ted and everybody—every Democrat up and down the ballot has got to do the same.

Yes, I know that folks say this every 4 years, but this time it's really true—[laughter]—I cannot think of a more important election in our lifetimes. Because the choice between candidates has never been this stark.

I mean, it's a choice between somebody who is as qualified as has ever been to run for this office, somebody who's, over and over, proven that they've—know how to lead and know how to work and understand the issues that working families are facing. That's on the one hand. And then, on the other hand, you've got a—somebody who, each and every day, every time he talks, proves himself unfit and unqualified for this office.

And I don't need to spend a huge amount of time selling this crowd on Hillary. If you want to hear the best case for Hillary Clinton, if you want to hear the very real stakes in this election, I would advise you to link up to Michelle's speech from earlier today in New Hampshire. She was pretty good. [Laughter] I mean, she—that's why you get married, to improve your gene pool. [Laughter] So your kids end up being superior to you.

So I don't need to sell you on Hillary. And I don't need to sell you on Ted. You guys know her, know him, have seen the track record that they have put together. But I'm going to go ahead and say some nice things about Ted anyway because he's here. [Laughter]

You know, I could not be prouder to call Ted a friend. He was a great Congressman for the people of Southeast Ohio. He was a great Governor for everybody in Ohio. He was a great campaign cochair for me in 2012. And there's a reason that Ted has always put working families first, because in those families, he sees his own families. He knows what it's like to struggle. He knows their hopes and their dreams.

He's the son of a steelworker. He's the first in his family to go to college. He's a minister who doesn't just talk the talk, but lives out his faith, and a public servant who puts his values into action.

So when he was in Congress, he fought to pass the Children's Health Insurance Program—working alongside Hillary—something that still helps millions of children today. As Governor, he froze public college tuition; made it free for Ohio veterans, which helped more young people succeed. And even though he took office as your Governor about a year before the recession hit, by the time he left, Ohio was the fifth fastest growing economy in America.

Ted delivered, and when it mattered most, he had your back. So on issue after issue, Ohio voters have a clear choice in this election: between somebody who sides with Ohio's working families, and somebody who sides with the special interests who want to block all of our progress.

So if you care about workers' rights, then the choice is pretty clear. Ted believes we should protect overtime pay so folks get paid what they've earned; that workers should have the right to bargain for better pay and better benefits. His opponent helped strip overtime from 6 million workers, backed a bill that would make it harder for workers to organize.

If you care about higher wages, the choice should be pretty simple. Ted believes that, in 2016, women should get equal pay for equal work. His opponent has voted against equal pay

five times. When it comes to the minimum wage, in 2015 I told Members of Congress if they truly believed they could work full time and support a family on less than \$15,000 a year, they should try it. And if not, they should vote to give America a raise.

Ted actually tried it for a full week. He actually did it, walked in a minimum wage worker's shoes. Understood how hard it was. Understood the reality of a single mom who's working full time and, at the end of the day, still doesn't have enough to keep a roof over her child's head or make sure that they get a good meal. That's why Ted keeps fighting to raise the minimum wage. And his opponent has voted against it again and again and again. So that's the choice in this election.

If you care about keeping our cops and our kids safe, you've got a choice. Ted Strickland supports commonsense gun safety measures like background checks, keeping assault weapons out of the hands of terrorists. Shouldn't be controversial. His opponent blocked background checks and opposed a bill to stop people on the terror watch list from buying a gun. That's why, as of last month, the NRA has spent more money against Ted Strickland than on all the other House and Senate races combined. Think about that.

If you care about our justice system and our most fundamental rights, then you've got a choice. Ted thinks we should have a full Supreme Court. That's—that didn't used to be a controversial position. Apparently, it is now. His opponent has helped to deny a simple yes-or-no vote to somebody who almost everybody agrees may be the most highly qualified nominee in history. Why? Does he think President Trump should fill the seat with somebody instead?

Audience member. No!

The President. Does he have confidence that that would go well? *[Laughter]* Which brings me to another fairly substantial difference. Unlike his opponent, Ted Strickland has never supported Donald Trump. Hasn't done it.

Now, I understand that Ted's opponent has finally withdrawn his support from Donald Trump—after looking at the polling, now that it's politically expedient. But he supported him up until last week. So I guess it was okay when Trump was attacking minorities and suggesting that Mexicans were rapists and Muslims were unpatriotic and insulting Gold Star moms and making fun of disabled Americans. I guess that didn't quite tip it over the edge. *[Laughter]* Why was that okay?

And now he says he'll vote for the Vice Presidential nominee instead, except that guy still supports Donald Trump. *[Laughter]* Does anybody really think that Ted's opponent is going to be a check on a Trump Presidency? Are we really going to risk giving Donald Trump the congressional majority he'd need to roll back all the progress that we've made over the past 8 years?

Audience members. No!

The President. Look, we know that most Republicans don't think the way Donald Trump does. Even in a banquet like this, full of hardcore Democrats. We have Republican friends, we've got Republican neighbors, we—at the Little League game, soccer game, parent-teacher's conference, we meet them. Some great people. We don't even think that most Republican politicians actually really believe that Donald Trump is qualified to be President. *[Laughter]* I know because they—I talk to them. *[Laughter]* They're all, like, man, this is really bad. *[Laughter]* We're just trying to get through this. *[Laughter]*

But so the problem is not that all Republicans think the way this guy does. The problem is, is that they've been riding this tiger for a long time. They've been feeding their base all kinds of crazy for years, primarily for political expedience. So if Trump was running around saying I wasn't born here, they were okay with that as long as it helped them with votes. If some of these folks on talk radio started talking about how I was the antichrist, well, you know, it's just politics. [Laughter] You think I'm joking. [Laughter]

If somebody completely denies climate change or is filled up with all kinds of conspiracy theories about how me and Hillary started ISIL. [Laughter] Or that we were plotting to declare martial law and take away everybody's guns. And we did a military exercise—Pentagon does these periodically—in Texas, and suddenly, all the folks in Texas were all, like, they're going to take over right now! [Laughter] I'm serious. And then, the Senator down there said, yes, we better look into that. [Laughter] And the Governor says, well, I don't know. What do you mean you don't know? [Laughter] What does that mean? Are—really? You think that, like, the entire Pentagon said, oh, really, you want to declare martial law and take over Texas? Let's do it under the guise of routine training missions—[laughter]—and everybody is going to be—but they took it seriously.

This is in the swamp of crazy—[laughter]—that has been fed over and over and over and over again. And look, I—and it's—there's sort of a spectrum, right? It's a whole kind of ecosystem. So—and look, if I watched Fox News I wouldn't vote for me. [Laughter] I understand. If I was listening to Rush Limbaugh, I'd say, man, this is terrible. [Laughter] Fortunately, I have a more diverse sources of information.

But—and I want to make a serious point here, because I'm not really—I'm really not exaggerating. Everything I'm saying are actual things that have been said and that people—a fairly sizable number of people in the Republican primaries believe. And the people who knew better didn't say anything. They didn't say, well, you know what, I disagree with his economic policies, but that's too—that goes too far. They didn't say, well, I'm not sure his foreign policy is the right one for America, but we can't allow our politics to descend into the gutter.

People like Ted's opponent, they stood by while this happened. And Donald Trump, as he's prone to do, he didn't build the building himself, but he just slapped his name on it and took credit for it.

And that's what's happened in their party. All that bile, all the exaggeration, all the stuff that was not grounded in fact just kind of bubbled up, started surfacing. They know better, a lot of these folks who ran, and they didn't say anything. And so they don't get credit for, at the very last minute, when finally the guy that they nominated and they endorsed and they supported is caught on tape saying things that no decent person would even think, much less say, much less brag about, much less laugh about or joke about, much less act on. You can't wait until that finally happens and then say, "Oh, that's too much, that's enough," and think that somehow you are showing any kind of leadership and deserve to be elected to the United States Senate.

You don't get points for that. In fact, I'm more forgiving of the people who actually believe it—[laughter]—than the people who know better and stood silently by out of political expediency, because it was politically convenient.

And if your only organizing principle has been to block progress and block what we've tried to do to help the American people every step of the way, so you're not even consistent anymore—you claim the mantle of the party of family values, and this is the guy you nominate?

And stand by and endorse and campaign with until, finally, at the 11th hour, you withdraw your nomination? You don't get credit for that.

You're the party that is tough on foreign policy and opposes Russia, and then you nominate this guy, whose role model is Vladimir Putin, the former head of the KGB? [Laughter] I'm sorry, what happened? [Laughter] It's disappointing. It really is. Because, yes, I'm a Democrat, but I'm an American first. And I actually believe in a strong two-party system. And I think that the marketplace of ideas should have a reasonable, commonsense Republican Party debating a reasonable, commonsense Democratic Party. But that is not what we have right now.

And the reason is, is because people like Ted's opponents, who know better, have stood silently by. They've been trying to block everything we've tried to do to help working folks for years now. Even here in the State of Ohio, they opposed us trying to save the auto industry on—upon which hundreds of thousands of jobs depend. And then, when it works out pretty good, you're taking credit for it. Man, look at this economy, it's gone great. [Laughter] Yes. [Laughter] But you sure didn't help. [Laughter] It wasn't because of your policies. That's not why Ohio grew. That's not why folks got back to work.

If—so the point is, if your only agenda is either negative—negative's a euphemism—crazy—[laughter]—based on lies, based on hoaxes, this is the nominee you get. You make him possible.

Now they're shocked. It's like, remember that movie—in "Casablanca?" Guy walks in, shocked that there's gambling in this establishment. [Laughter] Young people may not understand that reference. [Laughter] Go back, watch "Casablanca." Great movie. Humphrey Bogart. [Laughter]

So Donald Trump may make most Republican politicians look a little bit better by comparison. I mean, it's like the bar has gotten so low. [Laughter] But these are the same Republicans who tried to block us from rescuing the economy, did not offer a single vote when it came to the recovery package that made sure that we started growing again, long before any other advanced economy did. Same folks who didn't vote for the auto industry assistance that resulted now in record-breaking auto sales. The same folks who tried to take away folks' health insurance every chance they get; who refuse to allow votes on giving minimum wage workers a raise; refuse to support making sure women earn equal pay for equal work. How hard a concept is that? Why would you want your daughter to get paid 80 cents for doing the same job that somebody else's son is getting paid a buck to do? That doesn't make any sense.

So don't act like this started with Donald Trump. I mean, he did take it to a whole new level. [Laughter] I got to give him credit. But he didn't come out of nowhere.

And that's why we've got to win this election at every level. That's where you come in, Democrats. That's where your work will make a difference. That's where all the volunteer recruitment and the voter registration and the campus organizing comes into play. Because when Democrats have everybody on the field, we can't lose. And the other side knows that. That's why they're always trying to make it harder for folks to vote.

Which, by the way, that's a big difference between our parties. We're the only advanced democracy that has one party's central principle being, let's make it harder to vote. Doesn't happen other places.

We don't think more voices participating in our democracy makes us weaker, just like we don't try to divide people by race or faith or orientation or gender. We believe we're stronger together, not divided. And if we keep speaking to America's hopes over their fears, and if we inspire them rather than divide them; if we have concrete plans to respond to the very real challenges that folks face with the same sense of urgency and compassion and empathy that we feel in our own families and our own communities; if we care about every kid the same way we want this country to care about our kids, then we'll win in November.

I know that at times this has been a deeply dispiriting election year. And as I think back to 2008, or even 2012, and the sense of energy and hope that we felt, and I think about all the incredible work that we've done and the promises that we've delivered on, sometimes, you wonder, how did we get to the point where we have such rancor? And there are a lot of theories about it. People have real struggles in pockets of this country. Change is happening fast, sometimes faster than we feel like we can absorb. There's a constant stream of information coming at us, and so much of what attracts attention is the bad news instead of all the incredible things that are taking place in every corner of this great land.

But some of it, I think, really does just have to do with the fact that what's best in us has all too often stood on the sidelines and hasn't been heard and has left the field to some of our worst impulses.

So I want all of you to understand that when I reflect back on these 8 years, and I think about all the places I've been—all 50 States, towns and hamlets and big cities, suburbs and metropolises—and met people from all walks of life, on the factory floor, in classrooms, there's so much goodness in this country. There's so much decency in this country.

There's so much hard work going on in this country. There's so much ingenuity going on in this country. There's so much optimism in people's day-to-day lives and so much resilience. And we've just got to give expression to that.

We have to reflect our best selves. And that means even during political campaigns. We've got to show our kids the values that we want to pass on to them.

And you know what, the Democratic Party is not perfect. I can say that even in a Democratic Party dinner. *[Laughter]* We have our own blind spots, and we have our own disagreements. We have interest groups that oftentimes are understandably thinking about their narrow slice of the issue. And sometimes, we contribute to, sort of, the lack of civility in our politics. And we don't always check ourselves. There are times where we're not consistent in what we expect from our own leadership versus others, that—times where we ignore inconvenient truths ourselves.

But what I'm really proud about, what I continue to fundamentally believe is that, at its core, the Democratic Party believes that everybody counts. The Democratic Party believes in ordinary working people being able, if they're working hard, to get ahead. The Democratic Party believes that we got to leave a country and a planet that's better than the one we inherited for the next generation. The Democratic Party believes that everybody has dignity and everybody has respect and everybody is worthy of consideration. And the Democratic Party believes that we're all in this together.

And that's what we have to show for the next little less than 30 days. That's what we have to fight for. This isn't just about winning elections. It's also about affirming this democracy and affirming the basic idea that people who love their country can change it; that the most important office in this country is the office of citizen; that ordinary people, when they get

together, can transform this Nation and can solve any problem and can overcome any obstacle and can heal any division.

If you believe that, if you don't just go through the motions this time, but if you really dig deep and think about what's best in us and what are we fighting for and how do we give expression to that—if you believe that—I guarantee you we will not just elect Ted Strickland as the next Senator from Ohio, we will not just elect Hillary Clinton to be the next President of the United States, but we will secure a brighter future for the greatest nation on Earth.

And I'm going to be right there with you as a citizen of these United States. I'm going to work hard, and I'm going to organize, and I'm going to mobilize, and I'm going to make some phone calls, and I'm going to knock on some doors! And I want you along there with me. Because we got to keep this thing going. Because the journey is not done yet. Because I'm still fired up and I'm still ready to go!

Thank you, Ohio! God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:59 p.m. in the Battelle Grand ballroom at the Greater Columbus Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Sen. Robert J. Portman; Supreme Court Associate Justice-designate Merrick B. Garland; Republican Vice Presidential nominee Gov. Michael R. Pence of Indiana; Sen. R. Edward "Ted" Cruz and Gov. Gregory W. Abbott of Texas; radio show host Rush H. Limbaugh III; and President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Strickland, senatorial candidate Theodore, fundraiser in Columbus, OH.

Locations: Columbus, OH.

Names: Abbott, Gregory W.; Beatty, Joyce H.; Brown, Sherrod C.; Clinton, Hillary Rodham; Cruz, R. Edward "Ted"; Garland, Merrick B.; Limbaugh, Rush H., III; Obama, Michelle; Pence, Michael R.; Portman, Robert J.; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Ryan, Timothy J.; Strickland, Theodore; Trump, Donald J.

Subjects: Civil rights : Same-sex marriage; Civil rights : Wage equality; Economy, national : Household income and wages; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Poverty; Elections : 2016 Presidential and congressional elections; Elections : Voter participation; Energy : Domestic sources; Environment : Climate change; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Judiciary : Supreme Court :: Associate Justice-designate; Labor issues : Minimum wage; Labor issues : Overtime pay regulations, modernization efforts; Labor issues : Unions :: Labor movement and organized labor; Law enforcement and crime : Gun control; Ohio : Democratic Party events; Ohio : Governor; Ohio : President's visits; Russia : President; Terrorism : Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization; Texas : Governor.

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