

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser June 29, 2009

Thank you. All right everybody have a seat, settle down—I've milked that enough. [*Laughter*] What a joy it is to see so many good friends, people who, it's no exaggeration, without whom we would not be here. And there are just a lot of folks in this audience who took an early bet on somebody who, I think the professionals didn't give much of a shot at winning the Presidency, and I'm grateful to all of you. All of you I'm happy to see.

There are four people I want to acknowledge just because they're carrying a little extra burden right now. First of all, somebody who was great for our campaign, is now doing great work for the DNC, please give Jane Stetson a big round of applause. Thank you Jane. Our fearless leader during the campaign, who never wavered, never waffled, and cracked the whip with grace and good cheer, Penny Pritzker. Somebody who was there for us day in, day out, Andy Tobias.

And somebody who—I think some of you know this—this was the first elected official outside of Illinois to endorse my campaign. Now think about this, this is in February of 2007. He is the Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia. He stands beside me in Richmond, the seat of the old Confederacy, and says, "I'm endorsing Barack Obama for President of the United States." He's been there ever since. He's my friend, a great Governor, a great DNC leader, Tim Kaine. He hadn't been in office that long. He didn't know any better. [*Laughter*] And Anne, I think, was whispering in his ear. But Tim has just been an extraordinary friend, and he is now just doing an extraordinary job on behalf of the DNC.

As I said before, without you, we would not be here, because all of you were here in the beginning when it was hard. When people in this town didn't give us much of a chance, you stuck in there. And you didn't just fundraise; you put your hearts and souls into this campaign. I look at every single table, and there are people here who took their families, took their grandparents, took their cousins and nephews, and went into Iowa and went to New Hampshire and

campaigned and knocked on doors and insisted to skeptics that now was the time for change in America, and lo and behold we're bringing about some change in America.

We knew from the start that change wouldn't be easy. But we also understood we were living in extraordinary times, and that we've been asked to confront challenges of a size and a scope that hadn't been seen in recent history, a set of challenges that few generations of Americans have ever been asked to confront: two wars, a debilitating recession, a global financial crisis, a crisis that faces the planet when it comes to climate change.

And we understood that meeting these challenges was going to require some tough choices. It required us to do what was right, even if it wasn't necessarily always popular, at least not at first. It required taking on the status quo in Washington that unfortunately tends to favor inertia over action and tinkering over real reform. And we knew that it would require looking beyond the next news cycle, and the next election to the next generation, to do what we had to do to ensure that our children and grandchildren inherit an America that is as ascendant, as bold, as imaginative as the America that we inherited from our parents.

Now that's not just a responsibility. Meeting these challenges is a privilege and an opportunity, for in our hands lies the chance to shape the world for good and for ill. So let's just take a look at what we've done so far over the last 6 months, because in the blur of activity, I think we may be taking some things for granted.

Not 1 month into this administration, we responded to this financial crisis with the most sweeping economic recovery plan in our Nation's history; a plan that has already provided tax relief to 95 percent of working families, as we had promised, a plan that's saving jobs and creating new ones in construction and clean energy and small business across the country.

We passed a budget resolution that helps to cut our deficit in half while laying the foundations for all the building blocks required for a post-bubble economy: reforming our health

care system, initiating a clean energy agenda, revamping our education system so that our kids can compete in the 21st century.

We lifted a ban on Federal funding of stem cell research. We expanded the Children's Health Insurance Program to cover 11 million children in need. We passed a national service bill to create hundreds of thousands of opportunities for people to serve their communities. We passed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, the first bill I signed, so that equal pay for equal work is a reality all across this country.

That was just the beginning. We passed a series of reforms that won't just change policy in Washington, but changes how Washington work. We brought together auto executives and labor unions and environmental groups, Democrats and Republicans, together to set national fuel efficiency standards for our cars and trucks for the very first time in history. We will save 1.8 billion barrels of oil as a consequence of this agreement. We passed bipartisan legislation to help homeowners and to crack down on predatory lenders who are seeking to take advantage of them.

We passed laws to protect consumers from unfair rate hikes and abusive fees leveled by many credit card companies, a law that will eliminate waste in our defense budget and save taxpayers billions of dollars. And after decades of opposition, we passed legislation that will prevent tobacco companies from marketing to our children.

It's not bad for 6 months. So we should feel proud for what we've accomplished, but we can't be satisfied. We should feel confident in the future, but not complacent. We can't be content with the present. Not when there are workers that are still worried about losing their jobs or their homes or their health care. Not when there are so many children out there who aren't getting the skills that they need to compete in the 21st century. Not when justice is still elusive for too many in our society.

This is when it gets hard. This is when the criticism gets louder, when the pundits grow impatient, when cynicism seeks to reassert itself. This is when we hear the same voices advocating the same policies that got us into this

mess in the first place. This is where we hear that change just isn't possible.

So this is exactly the moment when we need to fight the hardest. This is going to be the time when we need to band together and when we decide we're going to do what's right for the country and deliver the change that we promised when I was elected last November.

Now is the time to build the schools that meet high standards and close the achievement gap and prepare our kids for the challenges of the 21st century. This is where we start rewarding teachers for performance and create new pathways for advancement. And this is when we start reaching that goal that I've set for 2020 that we once again are going to have the highest college graduation rates of any advanced country in the world because we know that's what it's going to take to compete in a 21st-century economy.

Now is the time when we're going to pass comprehensive energy legislation that caps carbon emissions and creates energy efficiency and millions of new jobs. On Friday, the House of Representatives took a historic vote and ignored the naysayers and said we are going to reach for the future and not look backwards, not cling to the past.

I don't know about you, but I have never looked at a American history book that praised America for not taking a chance. That said: The thing that really stands out about America is we just stood pat back in the agricultural era. When things were getting industrial, we decided no, we're not going to change. When the industrial era started moving into the information era—no, no, no, no, we can't handle the Internet; we're not going to do that.

That's not who America is. You keep on hearing these folks making these arguments about how we've got to be fearful of the future. I'm not interested in being afraid of the future. I'm interested in seizing the future for our children and our grandchildren, and that's what this bill is about.

Now is the time for us to finally do something about health care. We have been talking about it enough; we have had commissions; we have had white papers; we have had blue

ribbons. We have talked about it and talked about it, and now it's time to act.

And for those who would oppose our efforts, just turn to them and say, "Is there any way for you to defend the status quo?" And you'll hear a bunch of muttering and yammering, and they'll say, "Well, well, we agree with reform too." Okay, if you agree with reform, then step up, because we know that right now, families are being crushed by the cost of health care. Right now, businesses are being crushed by the cost of health care. Right now, our government is going bankrupt at the State and Federal level because of health care. Right now, 46 million people are without insurance.

Right now there's a woman in Wisconsin that I had a chance to meet who's got breast cancer and two small children. She's 36 years old. She had a job; her husband has a job. She's got health insurance, and she still has \$50,000 in debt. And instead of worrying about how to get well, all she can think about is whether she's going to be leaving a legacy of debt to her family if she doesn't survive this cancer.

That's not the kind of country that any of us are willing to accept. We know we can do better. And so I am saying to Congress and I'm saying to the American people, don't be afraid. Let us step forward. We know what needs to happen. We know that if we start applying commonsense rules to raise quality and reduce costs, that we can have a health care system that is uniquely American but finally provides coverage for all and is sustainable for the long term. You're going to help us make this happen. It's going to happen this year. We are going to have health care this year. We're going to have health care this year. *[Applause]* We're going to have health care this year.

We are going to have health care this year, we are going to reform the financial industry this year, and we are going to get energy done this year. And we are going to—and then we got a whole 'nother year after that. *[Laughter]*

But you've heard the argument. People say, oh, this is overload; we can't do this much. And I keep on trying to explain to people, I don't do this just for fun. *[Laughter]* If the health care system was working, we wouldn't remake it. If we weren't dependent on foreign oil and watch-

ing the Arctic Circle melt, then we wouldn't go to the trouble of passing a energy bill. The naysayers seem to think somehow that we can just keep on doing what we're doing, and the American people understand we can't.

But, the American people are also justifiably concerned about how change is going to come about. And that's completely understandable because we are going through the toughest economic times in our living memory. And most of the people here enjoy great good fortune. There are a whole lot of folks out there who are just barely hanging on. And so when they hear the fearmongers suggesting that this is going to cost them more money or this is going to cost them jobs or their health care is going to be taken away from them, and this is all a plot to grow the government, of course they take pause because, you know, they haven't been given a real fair shake for quite some time, and Washington hasn't been working for them, and most of the legislation that's coming out of this town has been a bait-and-switch on them. They've been promised one thing, and they've gotten something else. So I understand why there's going to be some skepticism out there.

And by the way, this stuff is not going to be easy. There are going to be bumps in the road, and there are going to be times where people get impatient. There are going to be times where folks lose heart. There are going to be times where we feel like maybe we bit off too much, and we can't get to our goal.

And when we have those times, I just want you to know that that all sounds pretty familiar, doesn't it? Because when Tim announced that he was supporting my campaign, the odds of us getting that done were a lot higher than the odds of getting health care done or the odds of getting energy done or the odds of reforming our financial institutions.

I want everybody here to understand that at this moment we have the opportunity to seize the future. And as painful as that is sometimes and as difficult as that is sometimes, it is inherent in the American spirit that we go forward, we don't look backwards. That's what this party is about; that's what this administration is about. You've proven that's what you're about. So help

me. We're going to get there for the American people.

Thank you, everybody. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:08 p.m. at the Mandarin Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Jane Stetson, national finance chair, Democratic National Committee; Penny S. Pritzker, chairman and founder, Pritzker Realty Group,

in her former capacity as national finance chair of the President's 2008 election campaign; Andrew Tobias, treasurer, Democratic National Committee; and Gov. Timothy M. Kaine of Virginia, in his capacity as chairman, Democratic National Committee, and his wife Anne Holton. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 30.

Remarks on Community Service Programs June 30, 2009

The President. Thank you very much. Well, it is wonderful to see all these do-gooders in one room. [Laughter] And it is always a dangerous thing trying to follow Geoffrey Canada. [Laughter] But I thank you all for being here.

Withdrawal of U.S. Troops From Iraq

Before we begin the subject of today's gathering, I want to say a few words about an important milestone that we've reached in Iraq. Today American troops have transferred control of all Iraqi cities and towns to Iraq's Government and security forces. And this transition was agreed to last year as part of our status of forces agreement with the sovereign Iraqi Government. It's a part of our strategy to responsibly end the war by removing all American combat brigades from Iraq by next September and all of our troops from Iraq by the end of 2011.

So the Iraqi people are rightly treating this day as a cause for celebration. This is an important step forward, as a sovereign and united Iraq continues to take control of its own destiny. And with this progress comes responsibility. Iraq's future is in the hands of its own people, and Iraq's leaders must now make some hard choices necessary to resolve key political questions, to advance opportunity, and to provide security for their towns and their cities. In this effort, America will be a strong partner to the Iraqi people on behalf of their security and prosperity.

Now, make no mistake: There will be difficult days ahead. We know that the violence in Iraq will continue. We see that already in the

senseless bombing in Kirkuk earlier today. And there are those who will test Iraq's security forces and the resolve of the Iraqi people through more sectarian bombings and the murder of innocent civilians. But I'm confident that those forces will fail. The future belongs to those who build, not those who destroy. And today's transition is further proof that those who have tried to pull Iraq into the abyss of disunion and civil war are on the wrong side of history.

Finally, the very fact that Iraqis are celebrating this day is a testament to the courage, the capability, and commitment of every single American who has served in Iraq. That's worth applauding. Through tour after tour of duty, our troops have overcome every obstacle to extend this precious opportunity to the Iraqi people. These women and men are not always in the headlines, but they're in our hearts and prayers, and we will forever honor their selfless service and sacrifice, as well as the service and sacrifice of their families. And there is more work to be done, but we've made important progress in supporting a sovereign, stable, and self-reliant Iraq. And everyone who's served there, both in uniform as well as our civilians, deserves our thanks.

Now, it's fitting that we're here today to talk about what each of us can do to lift up this Nation, because our troops' sacrifice challenges all of us to do what we can do to be better citizens. That's what the people that you've heard from already are doing every single day.

So I want to start off thanking Geoffrey Canada, Robert Chambers, Pat Christen—who's here with one of Hope Lab's