

Remarks at a Fundraiser for Senator Barbara Boxer in Los Angeles, California

April 19, 2010

The President. Hello, California! Hello. I am fired up. It's good to see you. All right, all right, all right. Okay. Thank you. Thank you, California.

I want to begin by just thanking—everybody's a special guest, but let me just point out some folks who are here who I want to acknowledge. First of all, somebody who was one of the finest Governors in the country, is now one of the best DNC chairmen of the country, Tim Kaine—give it up for Tim Kaine; attorney general, and may soon be another great Governor, Jerry Brown—where's Jerry?—he's around here somewhere; State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell is in the house; Congresswoman—outstanding Congresswoman Jane Harman; Congressman Joe Baca; Congresswoman Diane Watson; Congresswoman Laura Richardson; Congresswoman Judy Chu; former Governor Gray Davis; Speaker Emeritus—that's a pretty fancy title—[laughter]—Speaker Emeritus of the California Assembly Karen Bass is in the house.

I haven't seen her, but I'm told she's here, and I love this woman's music and her spirit, India Arie is supposedly in the house. Hello, India, wherever you are. Where is she?

Audience members. [Inaudible]

The President. Right there—there she—there—no—where you are?

Audience member. Backstage.

The President. Backstage—she's backstage, okay. I was like, where? I don't see her.

Somebody else who I'm very honored to have—I want everybody to acknowledge—

Audience members. There she is.

The President. There she is; there's my girl, India Arie.

And while we're at it with special people, somebody who helped Major League Baseball become what it is, but also helped America become what it is, Hall of Fame pitcher Don Newcombe is in the house. I just had the hon-

or of meeting him. Just had the honor of meeting him and taking a picture with him, and he was very gracious in saying, "You know, Jackie would be proud." And I said, "Well, I would not be here if it were not for Jackie and it were not for Don Newcombe."

It is nice to be back. It is nice to be in California, not just because it's good to get out of Washington—[laughter]—but one of the things that I enjoy most about coming to events like this is the chance to be with some old friends, to be with some of the people who were there with me at the beginning, who knocked on doors and made telephone calls and who helped us win the Presidency in 2008.

But as happy as I am to see you, I am even happier to be with my good friend and great Senator, Barbara Boxer. It was one of the privileges of being a Senator that I had a chance to work alongside Barbara. You know, California has been—

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. —you know, California has been a leader in promoting hybrids and cleaner burning fuels, and appropriately, you have in Barbara Boxer a subcompact Senator with a seemingly inexhaustible supply of energy.

Now, a lot of you are aware of how deeply Barbara cares about the environment, about her work to pursue clean—a clean energy future, and that work's vitally important. But what I also want you to know is that this is a woman who has a deep passion for fighting for you, fighting for all her constituents here in California.

She's passionate about fighting for jobs, jobs with good wages, jobs with good benefits. She's passionate about fighting for California's families. She is—

Audience member. Repeat "don't ask, don't tell"!

The President. We are going to do that.

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

The President. Hey, hold on a second, hold on a second. We are going to do that.

Audience members. Yes we can! Yes we can! Yes we can!

The President. So let's—

Audience members. Yes we can! Yes we can! Yes we can!

The President. There we go. All right—

[The disruption continued.]

The President. Guys, guys—

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. All right. I agree. I agree. I agree. Now—

[The disruption continued.]

The President. No, no, no—no, listen. What the young man was talking about was, we need to repeal “don’t ask, don’t tell,” which I agree with and which we have begun to do. But let me say this: When you’ve got an ally like Barbara Boxer and you’ve got an ally like me who are standing for the same thing, then you don’t know exactly why you’ve got to holler, because we already hear you, all right? I mean, it would make more sense to holler that at the people who oppose it.

When you’ve got Barbara Boxer, who is passionate about fighting to give people all across this State a fair shake, to put the American Dream within reach for all Americans, then what we should be worrying about is how are we going to make sure Barbara Boxer gets elected.

And that’s mostly what I want to talk about tonight. I am proud of the work we’ve done to bring the world together around a host of problems, from terrorism to the nuclear threat, from climate change to deprivation and poverty around the globe. I was gratified to sign a new START Treaty with Russia and to host so many world leaders in Washington last week, working in concert to reduce the perilous risk that nuclear materials could fall into the wrong hands.

But reviving our own economy remains the central challenge that we’re facing today. I

don’t have to tell you that. This State has been hit as hard as any State in the Union with economic troubles these past few years. Jobs have been lost at a heartbreaking level all across this State, and they’ve devastated families and devastated communities.

The housing crisis hit this State with a particular vengeance, driving your friends, your neighbors out of their homes, injecting a sense of fear and financial insecurity into too many people’s lives.

Audience member. It’s time for equality for all Americans!

The President. I’m sorry, do you want to come up here? You know, the—all right, because can I just say, once again, Barbara and I are supportive of repealing “don’t ask, don’t tell,” so I don’t know why you’re hollering.

Now, the problems that we have here put a further strain on folks in this State, forcing painful choices about where to spend and where to save. And the challenges folks have been facing here—

Audience member. [Inaudible]

Audience members. Yes we can! Yes we can! Yes we can!

The President. Barbara—

[The President talked privately with Sen. Boxer. He continued his remarks as follows.]

I just—everybody, I just wanted to confirm—I just checked with Barbara, so if anybody else is thinking about starting a chant, Barbara didn’t even vote for “don’t ask, don’t tell” in the first place, so you know she’s going to be in favor of repealing “don’t ask, don’t tell.”

Now, that is a key issue, but I think putting Californians back to work is also a key issue, because there are folks, gay and straight, who are out of work right now. And the challenges that are being faced right here in California are facing Americans all across the country.

Now, these aren’t challenges that suddenly appeared when I got sworn into office. They didn’t come out of nowhere. When I walked into the White House on that very first day, America was embroiled in a series of crises the likes of which we hadn’t seen in some time.

Abroad, we were confronting a war in Iraq that needed to come to a responsible end, a war

in Afghanistan that demanded greater focus, a new world of threats and new dangers.

And at home, we were facing a financial crisis that just about every credible economist said had the potential to plunge us into another great depression, an economic crisis that was producing stagnant wages, falling incomes, and a shaken middle class, and a deficit crisis that was saddling our children with a mountain of debt. That's what we inherited when we came in.

And while we've still got a long and difficult road ahead of us, while too many of our neighbors are still struggling, especially here in California, these are challenges that Barbara and I and others are working hard to solve together. We're beginning to see some signs of progress all across America: adding jobs instead of losing them; spending—people spending again; orders rising again; an economy that's growing instead of shrinking.

And, California, this progress we're seeing didn't happen by accident. It happened because we've taken a number of necessary but not always popular steps to break the back of this recession and to get our economy moving again. But you didn't send us to Washington just to manage the crisis or rescue the economy. You sent us there to rebuild it so that it was stronger than before, to make it more prosperous than it was before, more competitive than it was before. You sent us there to make the 21st century another American century and lay a new foundation for growth that will reach all our people.

And that's what health insurance reform was about. That's why we embarked on historic education reform. That's why we're embarking on clean energy reform. That's what our future's about. That's why we have restored science to its rightful place. That's why we renewed our commitment to research and development, from medical labs to nanotechnology. We're focusing on the next generation, California, not just the next election.

That's the mission that I've been trying to faithfully carry out on your behalf. And that's the mission that Members of Congress like Barbara have been carrying out faithfully on your behalf. Now, I'll be honest, it would have

been nice if we had had a little more help from the other side of the aisle sometimes.

Audience member. Any help.

The President. Say any help—[laughter]—and I—just a smidgen of help. [Laughter] And I've been disappointed sometimes that that little smidgen hasn't been more forthcoming. You would have expected that Republican leaders would have been willing to help out, cleaning up after this mess, since they had more than a little to do with creating it.

And we all have a stake in cleaning it up. We're all, after all, Americans. Not Democrats, not Republicans first; we're Americans first. So we should all have a stake in seeing success in cleaning this situation up. And yet, after driving our economy into the ditch, they decided to stand on the side of the road and watch us while we pulled it out of the ditch. They asked, "Why haven't you pulled it out fast enough?" [Laughter] "I noticed there's, like, a little scratch there in the fender. Why didn't you do something about that?" [Laughter]

Now, look, you know, that's their prerogative, California. That's also what elections are for. And the American people will have a clear choice when they head to the polls in November. And they'll have to do—all they'll have to do is look what we've been for and what the other side's been against.

For example, tax cuts—you know, we just had tax day, and there were a bunch of folks out there complaining about their taxes. I understand that. Nobody likes paying taxes, except I just want to make sure their anger is properly directed, because we were for putting \$200 billion in tax cuts into the pockets of the American people, tax cuts for making college more affordable, tax cuts for buying a first home. Altogether, we gave 25 different tax cuts for families and for businesses, several of them directed at small businesses that they're the backbone of our economy. Here in California, 98 percent of working families are getting a tax cut. So that's what we were for, and that's what the other side was against.

Audience member. Thank you for my tax cut.

The President. You're welcome. [Laughter]

We—Barbara and I and the other Members of Congress here—we thought it was wasteful and wrong to give billions of dollars to banks to act as unnecessary middlemen in administering student loans. So we said, let's use that money to help more students go to college and get the skills they need to outcompete workers around the world. We said, let's make the repayment of student loans more manageable so that kids don't start out with a crushing debt. That's what we were for; that's what they were against.

We thought it was unfair to deny health insurance to Americans with preexisting conditions. We thought it was wrong to let hard-working families and small businesses continue to get crushed by skyrocketing health care costs and families go bankrupt because somebody gets sick in their family. So we did what Americans have been trying to do for a century—Republican Presidents and Democratic Presidents and Republican Congresses and Democratic Congresses—and we finally enshrined the principle that all of us ought to have a sense of security when it comes to our health care. That's what we were for; that's what they were against.

In fact, the Republican leader in the House said the other day that repealing health insurance reform would be his number-one priority if he becomes Speaker of the House in November.

Audience members. No! Boo!

The President. So he would say to you and 800,000 Californians with preexisting conditions, "You know what? We think it was a mistake to make sure that you can get coverage." And he'd tell all those seniors, "Give back that \$250 you'll get this year to help pay for prescription drugs." And then he'll say to millions of small-business men and women who today qualify for new tax credits to help them cover their workers, "You know what? Your workers don't need health insurance, and you don't need help either."

Now, that—if he wants to run on that appealing agenda—[laughter]—go ahead. But Barbara Boxer's not going to let it happen, and I'm not going to let it happen, and you're not going to let it happen, and the American people are not going to let it happen, because we believe

that Americans should have affordable, quality health care.

Audience member. Thank you!

The President. You're welcome. [Laughter]

Now, even as we speak, we're in the midst of another important battle in Washington. I want everybody to be paying attention these next several weeks, because one of the main reasons our economy faltered was because some on Wall Street made irresponsible bets with no accountability. The rules weren't adequate. Sometimes the Government simply looked the other way. And as a result, we had a financial crisis that led to the loss of 8½ million jobs, a crisis that's caused millions of Californians to lose their homes and cost families and businesses trillions of dollars in savings and assets.

Now, I've said this many times before: I believe in the free financial market. I believe that's—that it's essential that we have a strong financial market, because that helps to boost dynamic economic growth.

But a free market doesn't mean you should be free to do whatever you want, however you can get it, without regard to consequences. There have to be some rules of the road, there's got to be some accountability, there's got to be some transparency, or else we're going to see more abuses and disastrous meltdowns like the ones we just experienced.

So Barbara and the Members of Congress who are here and I believe that we've got to update the rules governing the financial markets to bring greater accountability, greater transparency to Wall Street and greater protections to consumers and taxpayers and the broader economy.

And not surprisingly, Wall Street has fought some of these reforms—shocking. [Laughter] They've sent down an army of lobbyists. They're just waiting to water them down. The truth is, that's a big reason we got into this mess in the first place, because of the disproportionate power of these lobbies. So this time, we've got to get it right. This time, we have a responsibility to meet, a responsibility to the American people and to America's future.

Now, the Senate Republican leader, he paid a visit to Wall Street a week or two ago. He took along the chairman of their campaign commit-

tee. He met with some of the movers and shakers up there. I don't know exactly what was discussed. All I can tell you is when he came back, he promptly announced he would oppose the financial regulatory reform. He would oppose it.

Audience member. Shocking.

The President. Shocking. [Laughter] And once again, he's threatening to tie up the Senate with a filibuster to try to block progress.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. And he made the cynical argument that is just plain false that this plan that is essential to avoiding future taxpayer bailouts was somehow going to create taxpayer bailouts.

Now, understand, I'm not saying Democrats and Republicans ought to agree on everything. There are some things we just philosophically disagree on. And that's a good thing. That's part of our democracy. But a wise man once said, "He has the right to criticize who has the heart to help."

And all we're looking right now for is some help, some common sense and some help. That's what we hope the other side is going to do, not just criticize, but help, exercise some common sense. Don't just stand in the way, but lend a hand and help. Because the fact is, we need everybody's help. The problems we face are too great for any one party to solve. And all of us, Democrats and Republicans, have to come together to solve them.

All of us together have to tackle exploding deficits. That's why I directed my team to go through the budget line by line to cut what we don't need so we can pay for what we do. That's why I took a Republican idea, an idea they'd been fighting for, and set up a bipartisan fiscal commission to rein in our deficits. And Barbara and I set a clear goal to cut our deficits in half over the next 3 years.

All of us need to come together on behalf of clean energy. It's the right thing to do for the environment. It's the right thing to preserve our natural heritage. It's the right thing to do for our economy. And that's why, following California's lead, I worked to bring everybody up to a tough, new standard for cars and trucks, ushering in the first national standard

for fuel economy and greenhouse gas reductions. That's why Barbara and I worked together to provide incentives for companies building wind turbines and solar panels and green jobs that can't be outsourced. That's why we need to build on Barbara's good work and pass comprehensive energy and climate legislation, because the country that leads the energy economy will lead the global economy. Barbara and I want that country to be the United States of America.

All of us—all of us—need to come together to expand the reach of the American Dream. And that's why the first bill I signed as President helps ensure equal pay for equal work for men and women alike. And yes, that's why I'm committed to ending "don't ask, don't tell" and upholding nondiscrimination in the workplace.

That's why last week, I signed an order to help end the cruel practice of denying loved ones hospital visitation rights because of who they are. We need to keep a fundamental promise of America. We've got to keep a fundamental promise that it doesn't matter who you are, what you look like, where you come from, the blessings of this country are open to every single American.

So let me close by saying this: These have been difficult years for California, and they've been difficult years for America. And I can't pretend we're over all the tough times. There are going to be some more hard days ahead.

But here is what I want you to know: I have never been more optimistic about America's future. And I am optimistic because I know there are people like you out there and I know there are people like Barbara Boxer in the Senate who's fighting to change this country for the better. And because you are out there fighting and because Barbara is there fighting, I draw inspiration. And there are people all across this country who are dreaming of a better tomorrow, and then they are willing to fight for those dreams to come true.

And you know what? That's the story of California. This is a State that always drew dreamers, men and women with the courage to pursue their dreams. It's a State that inspired pioneers to head out across an unforgiving wilderness, a State that spurned—spurred glory

seekers to rush westward for gold, and the State that draws innovators and entertainers, from Hollywood Hills to Mountain View. And there's always been something about California that inspires us to dream, that's called on us to build a better life, that has helped us imagine the world as it is and then recognize that the world as it might be is out there.

And I'm absolutely confident that if folks in Washington can recapture that same spirit, that same boundless, resilient American spirit, we're not only going to rescue our economy, we're not only going to rebuild it stronger than before, but we're going to do what generations did before and make the American Dream more secure for our children and our grandchildren. That's what Barbara Boxer is about. That's what

you're about. And that's why I expect you to be out there making phone calls and knocking on doors and rallying the troops, just like you did in 2008, to make sure that you return Barbara Boxer to the United States Senate.

Thank you very much, California. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:12 p.m. at the California Science Center. In his remarks, he referred to State Attorney General Edmund G. "Jerry" Brown, Jr., of California; entertainer India Arie Simpson; Rep. John A. Boehner; and Sen. John Cornyn, in his capacity as chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee.

Remarks at a Reception for Senator Barbara Boxer in Los Angeles April 19, 2010

The President. Hello, hello. Good to see you. We've got a whole bunch of the congressional delegation—[*applause*—you know who you are. [*Laughter*] I see a whole bunch of supporters from way back. It's good to see you again. It is just wonderful to be back in California. And I can't think of a better reason to come back to California than to get Barbara Boxer reelected.

Barbara was taking us down memory lane there for a second. [*Laughter*] So I won't go into every detail about what Barbara and I, together, and every Member of Congress here together has had to deal with over the last year and a half. Barbara mentioned two wars, the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, a housing market that had completely collapsed. I forgot about the pirates, but you—[*laughter*—you forgot about the pandemic. [*Laughter*] That was kind of—that was like seventh or eighth on the list. [*Laughter*]

But look, the fact is, is that as tough as the situation has been in Washington, it's been a lot tougher on the ground for American people all across this country. You know about it because you've been dealing with it. In your capacity as community leaders, as elected leaders, you've seen what's happening here in California. And California, in a lot of ways, has been ground zero for what's been happening all across the

country: millions of people thrown out of work; millions of people losing their health care in the process of being thrown out of work; choices having to be made by local and State officials about are they going to hang on to teachers, are they going to lay off teachers, how are they going to pay off a burgeoning debt, how are we going to deal with the social services that are needed more than ever because of the crisis, but unfortunately, we've got less revenue to deal with.

So there have been a lot of people hurting out there. And I know that. I get 10 letters every single day that I read out of the 40,000 that I receive, and about half of them call me an idiot—because the charge of those selecting the letters is to make sure that we're evenhanded. [*Laughter*] But the other half—actually, the other three-quarters—tell again and again just heartbreaking stories about children asking why is it that they're having to move even though they really like the house they're living in and the neighborhood they live in; or families talking about how are they going to take care of their parents now that their retirement accounts were completely decimated, or how are they going to make their mortgage when both adults in the household have lost their jobs.