

What's clear is that Congress has a responsibility to act. But the truth is, any law will probably come too late to prevent the damage that's already been done this election season. And that's why any time you see an attack ad by one of these shadowy groups, you should ask yourself, who is paying for this ad? Is it the health insurance lobby, the oil industry, the credit card companies?

More than that, you can make sure that the tens of millions of dollars spent on misleading ads don't drown out your voice. Because no matter how many ads they run, no matter how many elections they try to buy, the power to determine the fate of this country doesn't lie in their hands, it lies in yours. It's up to all of us to

defend that most basic American principle of a government of, by, and for the people. What's at stake is not just an election; it's our democracy itself.

Thanks.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 4:30 p.m. on September 17 in the Library at the White House for broadcast on September 18. In the address, the President referred to H.R. 5175. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 17, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on September 18. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks at the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Phoenix Awards Dinner September 18, 2010

The President. Hello, CBC! Well, it is wonderful to be back with all of you. I want to acknowledge, first of all, chair of the CBC Barbara Lee for the outstanding work that she has done this year. Somebody who not only is a passionate defender of our domestic agenda, but also somebody who knows more about our foreign policy than just about anybody on the Hill, the chair of the CBC Foundation, Donald Payne, thank you. Our ALC Conference co-chairs, Elijah Cummings and Diane Watson, thank you. To Dr. Elsie Scott, president and CEO of the CBC Foundation, thank you for your outstanding work.

We've got a couple of very special guests here today. I want to give a shout-out to my friend, somebody who all of us rely on for his wisdom, his steadiness, the House majority whip, Jim Clyburn. A couple of folks who are working tirelessly in my Cabinet: the Attorney General of the United States, Eric Holder, is in the house; the woman who is charged with implementing health care reform, HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, is here; our United States Trade Representative, Ambassador Ron Kirk, is here.

And obviously, it is a great honor to have been able to speak backstage to this year's Phoenix Award honorees: Judith Jamison, Harry Belafonte, Sheila Oliver, and Simeon Booker. Thank you for everything that you've done for America.

I know you've spent a good deal of time during CBC weekend talking about a whole range of issues and talking about what the future holds not just for the African American community, but for the United States of America. I've been spending some time thinking about that too. [Laughter] And at this time of great challenge, one source of inspiration is the story behind the founding of the Congressional Black Caucus.

I want us all to take a moment and remember what was happening 40 years ago when 13 Black Members of Congress decided to come together and form this caucus. It was 1969. More than a decade had passed since the Supreme Court decided *Brown* versus *Board of Education*. It had been years since Selma and Montgomery, since Dr. King had told America of his dream, all of it culminating in the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act.

The founders of this caucus could look back and feel pride in the progress that had been made. They could feel confident that America was finally moving in the right direction. But they knew they couldn't afford to rest on their laurels. They couldn't be complacent. There were still too many inequalities to be eliminated, too many injustices to be overturned, too many wrongs to be righted.

That's why the CBC was formed: to right wrongs, to be the conscience of the Congress. And at the very first CBC dinner, the great actor and activist Ossie Davis told the audience America was at a crossroads. And although his speech was magnificent and eloquent, he boiled his message down to a nice little phrase when it came to how America would move forward. He said, "It's not the man, it's the plan." It's not the man, it's the plan. That was true 40 years ago. It is true today.

We all understood that during my campaign. This wasn't just about electing a Black President. This was about a plan to rescue our economy and rebuild it on a new foundation. Statistics just came out this week: From 2001 to 2009, the income of middle class families in this country went down 5 percent. Think about that. People's incomes during that period, when the economy was growing, went down 5 percent. That's what our agenda was about: making sure that we were changing that pattern. It was about giving every hard-working American a chance to join a growing and vibrant middle class and giving people ladders and steps to success. It was about putting the American Dream within the reach of all Americans, not just some. No matter who you are, no matter what you look like, no matter where you come from, everybody would have access to the America Dream.

I don't have to tell you we're not there yet. This historic recession, the worst since the Great Depression, has taken a devastating toll on all sectors of our economy. It's hit Americans of all races and all regions and all walks of life. But as has been true often in our history, as has been true in other recessions, this one came down with a particular vengeance on the African American community.

It added to problems that a lot of neighborhoods had been facing long before the storm of this recession. Long before this recession, there were Black men and women throughout our cities and towns who'd given up looking for a job and kids standing around on the corners without any prospects for the future. Long before this recession, there were blocks full of shuttered stores that hadn't been open in generations. So yes, this recession made matters much worse, but the African American community has been struggling for quite some time.

It's been a decade in which progress has stalled. And we know that repairing the damage, climbing our way out of this recession, we understand it will take time. It's not going to happen overnight. But what I want to say to all of you tonight is that we've begun the hard work of moving this country forward. We are moving in the right direction.

When I took office, our economy was on the brink of collapse. So we acted immediately, and the CBC acted immediately, and we took steps to stop the financial meltdown and our economic freefall. And now our economy is growing again. The month I was sworn in, we had lost 750,000 jobs. We've now seen 8 months in a row in which we've added private sector jobs. We're in a different place than we were a year ago or 18 months ago.

And let's face it, taking some of these steps wasn't easy. There were a lot of naysayers, a lot of skepticism. There was a lot of skepticism about whether we could get GM and Chrysler back on their feet. There were folks who wanted to walk away, potentially see another million jobs lost. But we said, we've got to try. And now U.S. auto industries are profitable again and hiring again, back on their feet again, on the move again.

There were folks who were wondering whether we could hold the banks accountable for what they had done to taxpayers or were skeptical about whether we could make infrastructure investments and investments in clean energy and investments in education and hold ourselves accountable for how that money was spent. There was a lot of skepticism about what

we were trying to do. And a lot of it was unpopular.

But I want to remind everybody here, you did not elect me to do what was popular, you elected me to do what was right. That's what we've been fighting together for: to do what's right. We don't have our finger out to the wind to know what's right.

That's why we passed health insurance reform that will make it illegal for insurance companies to deny you coverage because of a preexisting condition, historic reforms that will give over 30 million Americans the chance to finally obtain quality care, tackles the disparities in the health care system, puts a cap on the amount you can be charged in out-of-pocket expenses. Because nobody should go broke because they got sick in a country like the United States of America, not here.

That's why we passed Wall Street reform to finally crack down on the predatory practices of some of the banks and mortgage companies so we can protect hard-working families from abusive fees or unjustified rates every time they use a credit card or make a mortgage payment or go to a payday loan operation or take out a student loan or overdraw on their account at an ATM. Laws that will help put an end to the days of Government bailouts so Main Street never again has to pay for Wall Street's mistakes.

That's why we made historic investments in education, including our HBCUs, and shifted tens of billions of dollars that were going to subsidize banks and made sure that money was giving millions of more children the chance to go to college and have a better future. That's what we've been doing.

That's why we're keeping the promises I made on the campaign trail. We passed tax cuts for 95 percent of working families. We expanded national service, from AmeriCorps to the Peace Corps. We recommitted our Justice Department to the enforcement of civil rights laws. We changed sentencing disparities as a consequence of the hard work of many in the CBC. We started closing tax breaks for companies that ship jobs overseas so we can give those tax breaks to companies that invest right here in the United States of America.

We ended our combat mission in Iraq and welcomed nearly 100,000 troops home. In Afghanistan, we're breaking the momentum of the Taliban and training Afghan forces so that next summer, we can begin the transition to Afghan responsibility. And in the meantime, we're making sure we take care of our veterans as well as they have taken care of us. We don't just talk about our veterans, give speeches about our veterans; we actually put the money in to make sure we're taking care of our veterans.

And even as we manage these national security priorities, we are partnering with developing countries to feed and educate and house their people. We're helping Haiti rebuild, following an unprecedented response from the United States Government and the United States military in the wake of the devastation there. In Sudan, we're committed to doing our part—and we call on the parties there to do their part—to fully implement the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and ensure lasting peace and accountability in Darfur. As I said in Ghana, it is in America's strategic interest to be a stronger partner with the nations throughout Africa. That's not just good for them, that's good for us.

That's what we've been doing, CBC, at home and abroad. It's been an important time. We've had a historic legislative session. We could have been just keeping things quiet and peaceful around here, because change is hard. But we decided to do what was hard and necessary to move this country forward. Members of the CBC have helped deliver some of the most significant progress in a generation, laws that will help strengthen America's middle class and give more pathways for men and women to climb out of poverty.

But we've still got a long way to go: too many people still out of work, too many families still facing foreclosure, too many businesses and neighborhoods still struggling to rebound. During the course of this recession, poverty has gone up to a 15-year high.

So it's not surprising, given the hardships we're seeing all across the land, that a lot of people may not be feeling very energized, very engaged right now. A lot of folks may be feeling

like politics is something that they get involved with every 4 years when there's a Presidential election, but they don't see why they should bother the rest of the time, which brings me back to Ossie Davis. Ossie Davis understood, it's not the man, it's the plan. And the plan is still unfinished.

For all the strides we've made in our economy, we need to finish our plan for a stronger economy. Our middle class is still shaken, and too many folks are still locked in poverty.

For all the progress on education, too many students aren't graduating ready for college and a career. We still have schools where half the kids are dropping out. We've got to finish our plan to give all of our children the best education the world has to offer.

We've still got to implement health care reform so that it brings down costs and improves access for all people.

And we've got to make sure that we are putting people to work rebuilding America's roads and railways and runways and schools. We've got more work to do. We've got a plan to finish.

Now, remember, the other side has a plan too. [Laughter] It's a plan to turn back the clock on every bit of progress we've made. To paraphrase my friend Deval Patrick, the last election was a changing of the guard; now we've got to guard the change. Because everything that we are for, our opponents have spent 2 years fighting against. They said no to unemployment insurance, no to tax cuts for ordinary working families, no for small-business loans, no to providing additional assistance to students who desperately want to go to school. That's their motto: "No, we can't." [Laughter] Can you imagine having that on your bumper sticker? [Laughter] It's not very inspiring. [Laughter]

In fact, the only agenda they've got is to go back to the same old policies that got us into this mess in the first place. I'll give you an example. They want to borrow \$700 billion—keep in mind, we don't have \$700 billion—they want to borrow \$700 billion, from the Chinese or the Saudis or whoever is lending, and use it on tax cuts—more tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires. Average tax cut: \$100,000 for people making a million dollars or more.

Now, the next few years are going to be tough budget years, which is why I've called for a freeze on some discretionary spending. If we are spending \$700 billion, we're borrowing \$700 billion, not paying for it, it's got to come from somewhere. Where do you think it's going to come from? Who do you think is going to pay for these \$100,000 checks going to millionaires? Our seniors, our children, hard-working families all across America that are already struggling?

We shouldn't be passing tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires right now. That's not what we should be doing. We should be helping the middle class grow. We should be providing pathways out of poverty. And yet the man with the plan to be Speaker of the House, John Boehner, attacked us for closing corporate tax loopholes and using the money to keep hundreds of thousands of essential personnel on the jobs all across the States. He called these jobs, and I quote, "government jobs," suggested they weren't worth saving—teacher jobs, police officer jobs, firefighter jobs.

Ask your sister who's a teacher if her job is worth saving. Ask your uncle who's a firefighter if his job was worth saving. Ask your cousin who's a police officer if her job was worth saving. Ask your neighbors if their jobs were worth saving. Because I think a job is worth saving if it's keeping Americans working and keeping America strong and secure. That's what I believe. That's what's at stake in this. They want to hand Washington back over to special interests. We're fighting on behalf of the American people. They want to take us backwards. We want to move forward.

Their main strategy is they're betting you'll come down with a case of amnesia—[laughter]—that you'll forget what happened between 2001 and 2009, what that agenda did to this country when they were in charge. And they spent almost a decade driving the economy into the ditch. And now we've been down in that ditch, put on our boots—it's hot down there—we've been pushing the car, shoving it—[laughter]—sweating. They're standing on the sidelines, sipping a Slurpee—[laughter]—watching

us, saying: "You're not pushing fast enough. You're not pushing hard enough." [Laughter]

Finally, we get the car out of the ditch; it's back on the road. They tap us on the shoulder. They say, "We want the keys back." We tell them: "You can't have the keys back. You don't know how to drive. You can't have it back." [Applause] That's right.

Audience member. Can't give them the keys!

The President. You can't give them the keys. [Laughter] I mean, I just want to point out, if you want your car to go forward, what do you do?

Audience members. "D"!

The President. You put it in "D." You want to go backwards, what do you do? That's all I'm saying. That's not a coincidence. That's not a coincidence.

All right, all right, I get it. We've got to move this program along. [Laughter]

There are those who want to turn back the clock. They want to do what's right politically instead of what's right, period. They think about the next election. We're thinking about the next generation. We can't think short term when so many people are out of work, not when so many families are still hurting. We need to finish the plan you elected me to put in place.

And I need you. I need you because this isn't going to be easy. And I didn't promise you easy. I said back on the campaign that change was going to be hard. Sometimes it's going to be slower than some folks would like. I said sometimes we'd be making some compromises and people would be frustrated. I said I could not do it alone. This wasn't just a matter of getting me elected and, suddenly, I was going to snap my fingers and all our problems would go away. It was a matter of all of us getting involved, all of us staying committed, all of us sticking with our

plan for a better future until it was complete. That's how we've always moved this country forward.

Each and every time we've made epic change, from this country's founding to emancipation to women's suffrage to workers' rights, it has not come from a man. It has come from a plan. It has come from a grassroots movement rallying around a cause. That's what the civil rights movement made possible. Foot soldiers like so many of you, sitting down at lunch counters, standing up for freedom—what made it possible for me to be here today—Americans throughout our history making our Union more equal, making our Union more just, making our Union more perfect, one step at a time.

That's what we need again. So I need everybody here to go back to your neighborhoods, to go back to your workplaces, to go to churches and go to the barbershops and go to the beauty shops and tell them we've got more work to do. Tell them we can't wait to organize. Tell them that the time for action is now and that if each and every person in this country who knows what is at stake steps up to the plate, if we are willing to rise to this moment like we've always done, then together, we will write our own destiny once more.

Thank you. God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:47 p.m. at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to dancer and choreographer Judith Jamison; musician and activist Harry Belafonte; Sheila Y. Oliver, speaker, New Jersey General Assembly; journalist Simeon Booker; and Gov. Deval L. Patrick of Massachusetts.

Statement on the Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico September 19, 2010

Today we achieved an important milestone in our response to the BP oil spill, the final termination of the damaged well that sat deep under the Gulf of Mexico. I commend Admiral Thad

Allen, Secretaries Salazar, Chu, Napolitano, Administrators Jackson and Lubchenco, Carol Browner, the Federal science and engineering teams, and the thousands of men and women