

way to perfect our Union, organizing, marching, protesting peacefully together to make real those words that declared our Nation: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”

Those words must guide our response to the change that is transforming the Middle East and North Africa, words which tell us that repression will fail and that tyrants will fall and that every man and woman is endowed with certain inalienable rights.

It will not be easy. There’s no straight line to progress, and hardship always accompanies a season of hope. But the United States of America was founded on the belief that people should govern themselves. And now we cannot hesitate to stand squarely on the side of those who are reaching for their rights, knowing that

their success will bring about a world that is more peaceful, more stable, and more just.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:15 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to former President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia; former President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak of Egypt; Wael Ghonim, former executive, Google Inc., who was detained by Egyptian authorities for 10 days during the protests against the rule of former President Mubarak; Yitzhak Frankenthal, founder of the Parents Circle-Families Forum, an organization that seeks to bring together Israeli and Palestinian families that have lost loved ones to violence; and Ezzeldeen Abu al-Aish, a Palestinian doctor who lost three daughters to Israeli shelling in Gaza.

Remarks to the Women’s Leadership Forum

May 19, 2011

The President. Hello, everybody! Hello, hello, hello! It is good to be with all of you. First of all, how about the outstanding new chair of the DNC, Debbie Wasserman Schultz? Give it up for her. We’ve got a couple of other outstanding Members of Congress who are here: Senator Kirsten Gillibrand is here, and Representative Donna Edwards is in the house.

Now, I was a little confused when they told me I was coming here to address the Women’s Leadership Forum, because I address a women’s leadership forum every night at dinner. [Laughter] I just left a women’s leadership forum. [Laughter] I have Michelle, Malia, Sasha, my mother-in-law. [Laughter] It’s just me and Bo—[laughter]—trying to get a word in edgewise. [Laughter]

Audience member. We’re going to let you talk.

The President. Oh—that’s a change. [Laughter] The last time I spoke to the Women’s Leadership Forum was back in 2008. And a lot has changed since then. I’m a little grayer. [Laughter] Back then, we were in the middle of the worst recession since the Great Depression, a recession that would ultimately cost us 8 mil-

lion jobs. Today, we’ve got a recovery that’s taken hold. Our economy has now been growing for the past five quarters. We’ve created over 2 million private sector jobs in the last 14 months, more than three-quarters of a million private sector jobs in the last 3 months alone. Each of the Big Three automakers are now making a profit for the first time in years.

So obviously, the economy as a whole has an enormous impact on women and everything that women are doing to hold families together during extraordinarily rough times. But we’ve done a few other things. Along the way, we appointed two more women on the Supreme Court, including the first Latina on the Supreme Court. We launched a competition called Race to the Top that’s being touted all across the country for bringing about changes people couldn’t imagine at the local level in schools, and it’s also helping to recruit more women into the math and science professions, which we think is absolutely critical.

We finally passed health care reform to make sure that health care is affordable and available for every single American in the United States. And as part of reform, insurance

companies will cover preventive care like mammograms with no out-of-pocket costs. And it will be illegal to charge women more than men just because of their gender.

So we're making some progress, but we've still got a long way to go. For all the strides that we've made, women still hold fewer than 20 percent of the seats in Congress, which explains something. *[Laughter]* Women still only make up 3 percent of the Fortune 500 CEOs. Women are still earning only about 77 cents for every dollar that a man is earning. That's why the first bill that I signed into law was the Lilly Ledbetter bill, to make sure that women get an equal day's pay for an equal day's work. That's not too much to ask.

I was disappointed when another important bill to help end pay disparities, the "Paycheck Fairness Act," failed by just two votes when not a single Republican would vote for it in the Senate. So I'm going to keep on fighting to pass that piece of legislation.

Because SBA loans are three to five times as likely to go to women and minority business owners as conventional loans, we've invested in the SBA. And Karen Mills, our SBA Administrator, is doing an outstanding job. We are making sure that women entrepreneurs have the support they need not only to start a business, but to expand a business and create new jobs across America in the process.

Because about one in five women will be sexually assaulted in college, Vice President Joe Biden is working with our Adviser on Violence Against Women, Lynn Rosenthal, to help make sure our universities are fulfilling their obligation under Federal law to stop the scourge of sexual assault on college campuses across America.

We created the White House Council on Women and Girls, led by our very own Valerie Jarrett. We created the Office of Global Women's Issues at the State Department, led by Ambassador Melanne Verveer, to make sure our administration is focused on the issues that are facing women and girls here and around the world.

Overseas, we lifted the global gag rule that restricted women's access to family planning. We're making important investments in child

and maternal health. And we are working to stem the unspeakable cruelties that are being perpetrated against girls and women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

When it comes to our budget, we need to live within our means, and we've got to cut what we don't need so that we can afford to do the things that we have to do to grow our economy. But what I told the House Republicans during the budget fight is that I'm not willing to defund Planned Parenthood. I'm not willing to sacrifice basic health care and lifesaving preventive care for millions of women.

Now, the cause of women aren't just important to me as President, they are personal. I saw my grandmother hit a glass ceiling at the bank where she worked for years. She could have been the best bank president they ever had, but she never got that chance. I saw how Michelle was made to balance work and family when she was a vice president at a hospital. As a father, I want to make sure that my daughters and all of our daughters have the chance to be anything that they want. That's the America that we believe in. That's the America we're fighting for.

So to all of you who are activists in your communities, in your neighborhoods, in your work places, I want to say thank you for everything that you've already done to help advance the cause of justice and equality and prosperity and fairness. But I also want to underscore that we are not close to being finished. We are not close to being finished. Back in 2008, on that night in Grant Park, I told everybody, this is not the end, this is the beginning. And I warned everybody we were going to have a steep hill to climb. Change is never easy. And change certainly is not easy in a democracy because people argue, people have different points of view. That's part of what makes a democracy vital and healthy.

But we've made enormous strides over the last 2½ years. And that shouldn't be a cause for complacency, but it should give us enormous confidence that we can make even more changes over the next 5½ years. As long as each and every one of you continue to be involved, continue to be engaged, continue to

speak out, I promise I will be right there with you, every step of the way.

God bless you. God bless the United States of America. Thank you, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:02 p.m. at the Grand Hyatt Washington hotel. In his remarks, he referred to his mother-in-law Marian Robinson.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser May 19, 2011

So, first of all, if you want to get something done, you put a woman in charge—[laughter]—of the DNC. Debbie is going to do an outstanding job. She has been a leader in Congress on so many different issues. She's got energy, she's got verve, she's got drive. She doesn't take any guff from anybody. [Laughter] And she does it all; it's like the story about Ginger Rogers, right? She—although, I don't know—I do think her heels are pretty high. [Laughter] She's doing it all backward, in heels, and looking after a couple of kids. [Laughter] So we are just so grateful for her to be willing to take on this enormous assignment.

I want to thank John for hosting us. Where did John go? John has been a great friend for a long time, since before people could actually pronounce my name. [Laughter] For him to open up his gorgeous house is so appreciated.

And I want to thank all of you for being here. This is like a little reunion, because as I look around the table, I see extraordinary friends from all across the country, from Maine to Florida to California to—and everywhere in between. And so many of you worked so hard for us back in 2008. I would not be in a position to work on all the extraordinary issues and challenges that we face had it not been for your faith in me and your commitment. And so to all of you, I want to say thank you.

Now, I feel a little bit of pressure, because I understand that you heard Michelle speak today. [Laughter] And I try not to follow her. [Laughter] I was hoping that there would be enough separation so that you would have forgotten how good she was by the time I got here.

But since you all remember, I will not attempt to compete. But let me just say that that night in Grant Park in 2008, I spoke to the American people, I spoke to all the folks who

had fought so hard to help me win that election, and I said to all of you, this is not the end, this is just the beginning, and that we were going to have a steep hill to climb to get to where we wanted to be.

Now, we didn't know how steep it was going to be. We didn't realize at the time the full extent and full depths of the recession that we were going to face. We didn't understand the magnitude of job loss, how close the financial system came to breakdown. We had to take a series of swift, bold, and sometimes unpopular steps to make sure that the economy didn't go over a cliff.

And as Debbie mentioned, because of the actions we took, the economy is now recovered; it's growing again. Jobs are being added again. Manufacturing has seen more growth than we've probably seen in a decade. The Big Three automakers are back on their feet, making a profit, making cars that Americans want to buy. And they're all doing it, by the way, under new laws that we created with higher fuel efficiency standards so that we become less dependent on foreign oil.

But keep in mind that our goal was never just to get back to where we were in 2007 and 2008. I ran for President because for too long, the American Dream felt like it was slipping away for too many people.

In the previous decade, wages and incomes had flatlined for too many families. And as a group of strong women here, you understand that so many of the issues that we talk about, whether it's equal pay or health care access and affordability, those are things that directly affect families in profound ways. It makes a difference as to whether people can keep their homes or whether they're going to go bankrupt if they get sick. It makes a difference if they're