

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser in Medina, Washington

September 25, 2011

Thank you, everybody. Thank you very much. Everybody, please have a seat. Have a seat. What a spectacular setting. I was saying to Mark that I wish I had time to just roam around, because this is as beautiful a collection as I've ever seen. And I want to thank you, Mark, for the extraordinary—Jon—I want to thank Jon and Mary for the extraordinary hospitality. The Shirleys have been strong supporters for a very long time, and I'm very grateful to them for all of it.

I want to spend most of my time answering questions, so my remarks on the front end are going to be very brief. We are going through as tough a time as we have gone through in my lifetime and, looking around, in most of your lifetimes. It is not just a national crisis, it is an international crisis that we've been managing for the last 3 years. And over the last 2½, what we've been able to do is stabilize the economy, but stabilize it at a level that still leaves way too many people hurting.

I get letters from folks all across the country every single day, and the stories you get are just heartbreaking: people who are losing their homes, people who have lost their jobs, people who are wondering whether they can still send their kids to college and whether they're going to be able to retire—if they do.

And the steps that we've taken—whether it's to yank this economy out from a potential depression or expand opportunity for kids to go to college by extending more Pell grants and student loans to young people; whether it's investing in clean energy, investing in bioresearch; whether it's making sure that we've got health care for ever single American that's affordable and accessible—for all those steps that we've taken, we've still got a lot more work to do.

Now, when I was in Grant Park on that beautiful day—beautiful evening, and everybody was feeling good and everybody was feeling full of hope and change, I warned everyone this was going to be hard, that that wasn't the

end of a journey, but rather we were just beginning this journey. And that, in fact, has proven to be the case.

Domestically, we still have a lot more to do to heal this economy and to deal with some of the structural problems that existed even before the financial crisis hit. We still don't have an energy policy in this country that will free ourselves from dependence on foreign oil and can also generate new jobs in a new clean energy space.

We still don't have the kinds of trade strategies that will open ourselves up to new markets, but make sure that we've got trade that's fair, between ourselves and particularly the growing markets in the Pacific and the Asia region. We still have enormous challenges because middle class families have not seen their wages and their incomes rise for the last 20 years, even as those of us at the very top have seen an extraordinary explosion in our wealth and our incomes.

And as a consequence, part of the big problem that we have on the fiscal side—making sure that we close our deficits and we're responsible—demands us not only cutting out things that we don't need so that we can invest in things that we do, but it also requires that we have a system that is fair and just and make sure that everybody is carrying their fair burden and paying their fair share.

So what makes this tougher is our politics. I mean, Washington—you guys have been witnesses to what has been going on lately. My hope when I came into office was, because we were in crisis, that the other side would respond by saying now is the time for all of us to pull together. There will be times for partisan argument later, but now is not the time. That was not the decision they made. And so from the moment that I took office, what we've seen is a constant ideological pushback against any kind of sensible reforms that would make our economy work better and give people more opportunity.

We're seeing it even now. I mean, as we speak, there is a debate going on in Congress about whether disaster relief funding should be granted as part of the overall budget to keep the Government open. Now, keep in mind we've never had this argument before. And what makes it worse is that some of the Republicans who are opposing this disaster relief, it's their constituents who have been hit harder than anyone by these natural disasters.

So what I did over the last 2 weeks was say to Members of Congress—Democrat and Republican, but particularly to the Republicans—I'm prepared to work with you, but these games have to stop. And given how high unemployment is right now, we've got to act. We can't just be engaged in the usual partisan bickering here in Washington. We put forward a jobs act that would—it's estimated to grow the economy by an additional 2 percent and put as many as 1.9 million back to work. And we're paying for all of it by continuing to make cuts in programs that we don't need and making adjustments to entitlement programs like Medicare and Medicaid, but also making sure that we've got a Tax Code that is fair.

So we are just going to keep on pounding away at this issue. How they will respond, we don't yet know. And part of it is going to depend on how much pressure they're feeling from people all across the country, here in the Pacific Northwest, but everywhere else. And yet we are going to just keep on drawing a clear contrast between a vision that we have for where we want to take this country, one in which we're living within our means, but also investing in infrastructure and investing in schools and investing in education and investing in basic research and innovation.

I'm happy to contrast that with a vision that says somehow we've got to shrink our vision about what America is, that we can't afford a safety net, we can't afford environmental laws, we can't afford a fair Tax Code. I reject that vision, and I think most of the American people do as well.

Now, let me just close by saying this: 2012 is going to be tough. This is going to be a tough—this is not going to be all good feeling, although I do have to remind people 2008 wasn't all good feeling either. *[Laughter]* I mean, sometimes, people—those of you who are involved in the campaign, there is a lot of revisionist history that says our campaign was perfect and we never had any problems and it was all just the big “Hope” posters and everybody was feeling good—Bruce Springsteen singing. *[Laughter]* That wasn't how it felt when I was in the middle of it. *[Laughter]*

So this stuff is always hard. But this is going to be especially hard, because a lot of people are discouraged and a lot of people are disillusioned about the capacity of their leadership and of Government to make significant changes in their—that impact them in a positive way. But I'm determined, because there is too much at stake. The alternative, I think, is an approach to government that will fundamentally cripple America in meeting the challenges of the 21st century. And that's not the kind of society that I want to bequeath to Malia and Sasha and your children and your grandchildren.

So we've got a lot of work to do. You being here today is evidence that you are ready to do the work. But understand, we're just starting off here. We've got 14 months, and I'm going to need all of you to help mobilize people and push back against arguments that say that somehow if we're only—if we've only gotten 80 percent of what we wanted to get done, that that's a failure. No, that's a success. That should be an inspiration for us getting reelected so I can do the other 20 percent.

And so I'm grateful to all of you, and I hope that all of you end up, despite the ups and down inevitable in a campaign, that you guys will be just as excited on Inauguration Day of 2013 as you were Inauguration Day 2009.

All right? Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:52 p.m. at the residence of Jon A. and Mary Shirley. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.