

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser in Seattle, Washington September 25, 2011

Thank you, everybody. Everybody, please have a seat. Have a seat. Now, first of all, it is wonderful to see all of you. It is wonderful to be introduced by two Hall of Famers, Lenny Wilkens and Bill Russell. I don't know if you guys noticed that Bill needs a higher mike. [Laughter] It was a little low for him. But it was incredible to get to know those two gentlemen during the course of the campaign, and they have just been great, great friends.

In addition, obviously, I want to acknowledge your outstanding Governor, Christine Gregoire. I want to thank the—Robert Cray and the Robert Cray Band. I want to thank—you have some of the best elected officials in the country, and you've got some of the best congressional—I think one of the best congressional delegations in the country. Stand up, congressional delegation—[inaudible].

It is great to be back in this gorgeous city, and it's good to be outside of Washington. I'm thrilled to be here with all of you. I've even come here during a Bears-Packers game. [Laughter] And that tells you how much I need your help. I've come because I need you to help finish what we started in 2008.

Now, back then, we started this campaign not because we thought it would be a cakewalk. After all, you supported a candidate named Barack Hussein Obama. [Laughter] You didn't need a poll to know that that was not going to be easy. Lately, there's been some revisionist history: People talk about, oh, what an incredible, smooth campaign that was. And I'm thinking, that's not how it felt to me. [Laughter] But as daunting as it was, as many setbacks as we had, we forged ahead because we had an idea about what this country is. We had an idea about what this country can be.

Many of you, many of our parents, our grandparents, we grew up with faith in an America where, if you work hard, if you're responsible, then it pays off. If you stepped up and you did your job and were loyal to your company, that loyalty would be rewarded with

a decent salary and decent benefits and a raise once in a while and some security. And you had some belief that the American Dream could be yours and that your kids could dream even bigger.

And over the last decade, that faith has been profoundly shaken. The rules changed. The deck kept on getting stacked against middle class Americans and those aspiring to be in the middle class. Nobody in Washington seemed willing or able to do anything about it.

So in 2007, all of this culminated in a once-in-a-lifetime economic crisis, a crisis that's been much worse and much longer than your average recession. You know they—historians have looked, and typically a recession that comes about because of a financial crisis is much deeper and much longer. It takes a long time to work its way through. And so, from the time I took office, we knew, because this crisis had been building for years, it was going to take us years to get back to where we wanted to be.

The question now is not whether people are still hurting. They are. Every night, I read letters from constituents all across the country, and the stories are heartbreaking. I talk to people out on the road and men and women who've had to close a business that's been in their family for generations or folks who've had to cross items off the grocery store list to save money so they can fill up the gas tank to get to work, parents having to postpone retirement because they're committed to sending their kids to college. A lot of folks out there are hurting.

And the question is not whether this country has been going through tough times. The question is, where are we going next? We can either go back to the same ideas that the other side is peddling, old worn-out ideas that were tried throughout the last decade, where corporations get to write their own rules and those of us who've been more—most fortunate get to keep all our tax breaks and we abandon our

commitment to caring for the vulnerable and we abandon our commitment to investing in the future and investing in infrastructure and investing in education and basic research. Or we can build an America that we talked about in 2008, an America where everybody gets a fair shake and everybody does their fair share. And that's what this election is about. And that's what we've been fighting for, for the last 2½ years.

Think about it. When we wanted to save the auto industry from not just bankruptcy, but liquidation, there were a whole bunch of folks on the other side who fought us tooth and nail. And that was not easy. They said it was going to be a waste of time and a waste of money. You know what? We did it anyway. And we saved thousands of American jobs as a consequence, and we made sure that America is still making cars that we're selling around the world.

And by the way, contrary to the naysayers, the taxpayers are getting their money back. And today, the American auto industry is stronger than ever, and they're making fuel-efficient cars that are stamped with three proud words: Made in America.

When we wanted to pass Wall Street reform to make sure that a crisis like this never happens again, we had lobbyists and special interests spend millions of dollars to make sure we didn't succeed. And you know what? With the help of some of these folks sitting at this table, we did it anyway and passed the toughest reforms in our history and reforms that prevent consumers from getting ripped off by mortgage lenders or credit companies. Today, there are no more hidden credit card fees. There are no more unfair rate hikes, no more deception from banks. That is not an accident. That is because we fought for it, and we got it done.

Most Republicans voted against it, but we were able to cut \$60 billion—that's with a "b"—\$60 billion in taxpayer subsidies that were going to big banks through the student loan program. We took that money, and now that's going to millions of kids all across the country in increased Pell grants and cheaper student loans so they've got access to college.

Instead of giving more tax breaks to the largest corporations, we cut taxes for small businesses and for middle class families. The first law I signed into law—the first bill I signed into law made sure that women earn equal pay for an equal day's work because I want our daughters to have the same opportunities as our sons.

We repealed "don't ask, don't tell" so that never again will gay and lesbian Americans need to hide in order to serve the country they love. And while we're at it, we passed health care reform to make sure that nobody goes bankrupt because they get sick.

And every one of these issues were tough. Every one of them, we had to fight for. And yet, despite all the good that we've done over the last 2½ years, we've still got so much more work to do. We've got so much more work to do to make sure that everyone in this country gets a fair shake, to make sure that every American has a chance to get ahead. And that's where I need your help.

About 2 weeks ago, I sent to Congress a bill called the "American Jobs Act." Some of you might have heard about this. Everything in it is the kind of proposal that's been supported by Democrats and Republicans in the past. Everything in it will be paid for. It will put people back to work. It will put more money into the pockets of working people. Congress should pass this bill right away.

We've got millions of construction workers who don't have jobs right now. This bill says, let's put these men and women to work rebuilding our roads and our bridges and our highways. I don't want the newest airports in Singapore and the fastest railroads in China. I want them built right here in the United States of America. There's work to be done. There are workers to do it. Let's tell Congress to pass this jobs bill and make it happen right now.

It shouldn't be a partisan issue. What happened? Republicans used to like roads. [Laughter] Do you remember that? Mr. Mayor, you remember, don't you? Suddenly, they don't like roads because Democrats are proposing it? That doesn't make any sense.

In places like South Korea, they can't hire teachers fast enough. I had lunch with the President of Korea. I asked him, "What's your biggest problem?" He said: "Oh, the parents. They're too demanding. They're telling me I've got to hire all these teachers, and so we can barely keep pace. We're hiring—we're importing them from abroad. They think that their kids should learn English when they're in kindergarten." Because they know that educating their children is the key to success in this 21st-century economy.

Now, that shouldn't be a partisan idea. But here we are, we're laying off teachers in droves, here in America. There are schools around the country where they've eliminated music, art. They've got one science teacher running around 15 different classrooms because they don't have enough staff; kids learning in trailers. That's unfair to our kids. It undermines our future.

But if we pass this jobs bill, we will put thousands of teachers in every State back in the classroom where they belong. Tell Congress to pass this jobs bill and put our teachers back to work.

Tell Congress to pass this jobs bill, we'll put—we'll give companies tax credits for hiring American veterans. These folks serve us, to keep us free and to keep us safe. They interrupt their careers. They leave their families. They put themselves in harm's way. They shouldn't have to fight for a job when they come home. That's not who we are as Americans. Pass this jobs bill and give veterans more opportunity.

The "American Jobs Act" will cut taxes for virtually every worker in America, cut taxes for every small-business owner in America, gives an extra tax cut to every small business that hires more workers or raises their wages. So don't just talk about helping America's job creators. How about actually helping them? Get this bill passed right away.

A lot of folks in Congress have said, "Well, maybe in the past we might have supported these things, but we're not going to support any new spending that's not paid for." Well, I think that's important. So I also laid out a plan

to pay for the "American Jobs Act" that—and not only pays for the jobs act, but brings our debt down to manageable levels over time. It adds to the \$1 trillion in spending cuts I already signed this summer, which, when you add it all together, will be one of the biggest spending cuts in history. But it's not all done right now. It's spread out over time so it doesn't endanger a recovery.

Now, it's also a plan that says, if we want to close the deficit and pay for this jobs plan, we can't just cut our way out of the problem. We've got to also ask those of us who are most fortunate, the wealthiest Americans, the biggest, most profitable corporations, to pay their fair share. It's time to reform the Tax Code based on a very simple principle: Warren Buffett's secretary shouldn't be paying a higher tax rate than Warren Buffett. A teacher or a nurse or a construction worker making \$50,000 a year shouldn't pay a higher tax rate than somebody pulling in \$50 million. It's not fair. It's not right. It has to change.

Now, you're already hearing the other side saying, "Well, hold on, that's class warfare." Let me say this. In America, we believe in success. That's what's great about this country. You have a good idea, you start a new business, you're 6'10" and a perennial all-star—[laughter]—and you're willing to put in the work and the effort and the drive, and you've got an idea that creates a new product or service, we want you to be successful. That's what America is about, the idea that any one of us can make it if we try. Anybody can open a business. Anybody can have an idea that makes us a million—into a millionaire or billionaire. That's great. This is the land of opportunity.

But you know what, if we want to make sure that this is the land of opportunity not just for ourselves, but for our kids and our grandkids, then we've got to make sure that those of us who are doing well should pay our fair share in taxes, to contribute to the Nation's success, the Nation that made our own success possible. And that means investing back in schools, and that means making sure we're building decent roads.

You know, I was just with a group of folks that included some Microsoft executives. The fact is, if we hadn't invested in DARPA and the infrastructure for the Internet, there would be no Microsoft. And most wealthy Americans would agree that we've got to make sure that we are reinvesting to make this a land of opportunity for everybody, to make investments that will help us grow our economy and deal with the debt that threatens our future.

So yes, the Republicans are dusting off their old talking points and calling this tax—this class warfare. But you know what, if asking a billionaire to pay the same tax rate as a plumber makes me a warrior for the middle class, I'll wear that charge. I'll wear that as a badge of honor. [Applause] I'll wear that as a badge of honor. Because the only class warfare I've seen is the battle being waged against the middle class in this country for decades.

Look, this is about priorities. It's about choices. If we want to pay for this jobs plan, if we want to close this deficit, if we want to invest in our future, if we want to put teachers back in the classroom, if we want to make sure that we've got the best roads and bridges and airports, if we want to lay broadband lines and wireless service for everybody, the money has got to come from somewhere.

So would you rather keep tax loopholes for oil companies, or would you rather put construction workers and teachers back on the job? Would you rather keep tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires, or do you want to invest in medical research and new technology? Should we ask our seniors to pay thousands of dollars more for their Medicare, or should we ask the most profitable corporations to pay their fair share?

That's what this debate is about. That's what's at stake right now. This notion that the only thing to do to restore our prosperity is to eliminate environmental rules, bust unions, and make sure that we're giving tax breaks to the folks who are most fortunate and tell everybody else that they're on their own, that's not who we are. That's not the story of America. Yes, we are rugged individuals. Yes, we are strong and self-reliant. We don't like being told

what to do by the Government or anybody else. But it has always been the drive and initiative of our workers and entrepreneurs combined with our ability to work together as a society that cares for one another and gives everybody a chance—that's what's made this economy the engine and the envy of the world.

It hasn't just been about "me first." There's always been a running thread that says we're all connected, that there are some things that we can only do together as a nation. It's obvious when we think of our collective defense, when we think about the fire service or when we think about the military. But it's also true when it comes to our schools. It's also true when it comes to protecting our natural resources. That's why Presidents like Lincoln and Eisenhower, two Republicans, invested in railroads and highways and science and technology. It's why this country gave millions of returning heroes, including my grandfather, the chance to study through the GI bill. It's the reason that Michelle and I had the chance to succeed beyond our wildest dreams, because not only did we have great parents and grandparents, but we also had the ability to get student loans. We also had this opportunity that the country gave us.

So don't be confused. No single individual built America on their own, and no single individual makes it on their own. We've built it together. We have been and always will be "one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all," but also a nation with responsibilities to ourselves and responsibilities to one another. And it's time for us to meet those responsibilities right now. It's time for us to meet our responsibilities to each other right now.

And maybe some in Congress would rather settle those differences at the ballot box in November, but I've got news for them. The next election is 14 months away, and the American people cannot wait. They do not have the luxury of us squabbling for another 14 months. A lot of folks are living week to week, paycheck to paycheck, day to day. They need action, and they need it now.

Which brings me to you. I'm asking all of you to lift up your voices. You need to help us

out. I want you to put pressure on Congress. The folks here, they're already voting for it, so you've got to go find some people who aren't. And I'm asking you to join me in finishing what we started in 2008.

Now, these have been tough, tough times for everybody, these last 2½ years. I know there are times, there are moments, when folks feel discouraged. You may still have the old "Hope" poster in the back somewhere. [Laughter] But you're thinking, man, we're struggling, the unemployment rate's still high, and the politics in Washington seem just as polarized as ever. So you feel frustrated. And there's a natural tendency to sink back into cynicism, to say, you know what, this can't be fixed. But I tell you what, if we had that attitude back in 2008, we never would have won. And more importantly, if we had that attitude throughout our history, then America wouldn't be what it is today.

Every bit of progress that's been worth making has been a struggle, whether it was civil rights or women's rights, the movement to expand educational opportunities to all, the institution of our basic safety net like Social Security and Medicare. It's always been a struggle. And there have been points at every juncture where it's been discouraging. And people have felt like, well, maybe change can't happen. Maybe we're stuck. Maybe America's best days are behind us. And what's prevented that from happening has been the American people, that sense not only of innate decency, that sense of fairness that is just in the DNA of America, but also that sense, you know what, we're not

somebody who—we're not a people who sit back and give up. We don't just let things happen to us. We make things happen.

And that spirit, which we captured in 2008, we need this spirit now more than ever. So I need you guys to shake off any doldrums. I need you to decide right here and right now, and I need you to talk to your friends and your neighbors and your coworkers. You need to tell them, you know what, we're not finished yet. We've got more work to do. We are going to build an America that we believe in, a place where everybody has a fair shot, everybody does their fair share, a generous, big, tolerant America, an optimistic America.

We are tougher than the times that we live in. We are bigger than the small politics that we've been witnessing. We are a people who write our own destiny, and it is fully within our power to write it once more. So let's meet this moment. Let's get to work. Let's show once again why the United States of America is the greatest country on Earth.

God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:38 p.m. at the Paramount Theatre. In his remarks, he referred to former National Basketball Association guard Leonard R. Wilkens and center William F. Russell; Mayor Michael P. McGinn of Seattle; President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea; and Warren E. Buffett, chief executive officer and chairman, Berkshire Hathaway Inc. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 26.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser in San Jose, California

September 25, 2011

The President. Hello, everybody. It is good to be back in Silicon Valley. It is good to be back at the Thompson residence. I try to make this a regular stop. [Laughter] Once every year or two, I figure, well, I need a little dose of John and Sandi and their friends. So thank you

all for being here. Thanks for arranging wonderful weather.

A couple of other people I want to acknowledge. First of all, I hope they're still here, because I love them and they do a great job every single day: Congressman Mike Honda in the