

So that's the project, and it is unfinished. And I don't know about you, but I think we have no choice but to finish it. We cannot go backwards at this point, so we're going to have to go forward. We're going to have to go forward. And the only way I'm going to be able to go forward is with you.

So I appreciate you guys coming out on a muggy, Washington-style summer night. And my hope is, is that this is just the beginning of your commitment to what is going to be a tough road ahead over the next 18 months. But then, another 4 years of tough stuff that we're

going to have to do in order to deliver the kind of America we want.

So with that, I'm going to take two questions, and then I'm going to move on to the next thing. But I'm sure that somebody here must have a couple of questions.

[At this point, the President took questions from participants, and no transcript was provided.]

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:40 p.m. at the residence of R. Donahue Peebles and Katrina L. Peebles.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser August 8, 2011

Thank you. All right, everybody have a seat here. Thank you so much. It is wonderful to be here. And I was doing a quick taping outside, and it sounded like—I don't know if it was Matthew or Barzun who were warming you up pretty good. [Laughter] But I appreciate it.

I want to spend most of my time answering questions and then going from table to table, so I'm not going to make a lot of remarks at the top.

Obviously, we've had a tough couple of weeks in the economy. Too much of it was self-inflicted. It had to do with political paralysis here in Washington. And that's not a surprise to a lot of folks, but I think for the American people they recognize that we don't have time for some of the squabbling that's been taking place because there are too many folks who are still out of work, too many businesses who are still trying to grow. And for us to have seen the kind of brinkmanship that we saw on the debt ceiling made absolutely no sense in terms of where we need to take the country.

Having said that, despite the tough couple of weeks that we've had, I think the bigger challenge that we face is to keep our eye focused on the underlying challenges that we're going to have to solve here in the United States of America over the next 4 or 5 years so that we can be competitive and we can pass on the kind of America we want to future generations.

Markets will go up and down, but the underlying challenges have held steady for too long. We have an education system that is failing too many of our kids. And if we don't fix that, then we're not going to be able to compete with China or India or Brazil, who are very hungry and know that whichever country has the best workforce, the most highly skilled workforce, is going to be the country that succeeds economically.

We've had a health care system that, for too long, costs way too much and doesn't produce good enough results. And so we started with health care reform to move that in the right direction, but we've still got more work to do, particularly in Medicare and Medicaid, which is the main driver of our Federal debt.

We're going to have to fix our Tax Code, because for years it has been rife with loopholes and for years it's been inefficient and for years it hasn't been fair. And we're going to have to raise more revenue to close our deficit and deal with our debt over the long term, but we've got to do it in a way that is reflective of who we are as Americans, and that means that everybody pitches in, in order to make sure that the country is successful.

We know that we've got to invest in basic research, and nowhere is that more necessary than in the energy sector, because whatever is happening on any particular day in the spot oil

market, we know what the long-term trends are going to be, which is oil consumption is going to be going up, and not only is that going to be a millstone around the neck of the economy, but we also know that if we keep on using fossil fuels at the pace that we're using right now, it's going to have an impact on the environment.

So there are a set of things that we know need to happen, and what I want to emphasize to you—and I'll emphasize it during the Q&A, and as I have a chance to greet you going around the tables—is that the problem is not a technical one. This is not—there are some tough issues, like can we—how fast can we replace our use of fossil fuels given the needs of a modern economy. But when it comes to, for example, dealing with our long-term debt and deficit, the problem is not that we don't know the math. We've had commission after commission after commission looking at this thing. And the challenge is simply that the politics in this town doesn't seem to be equipped to make modestly tough choices.

And by the way, these choices are not radical. When it comes to getting a sustainable debt level, if we went back to the rates that existed when Bill Clinton was President and we made some modest adjustments to Medicare that preserved the integrity of the system, our long-term debt and deficit problems would go away. And most people here wouldn't notice those changes. But we've become so dug in when it comes to sort of ideological purity that we're not willing to make modest adjustments like that.

Now, here's the good news. The good news is that I think there has been enough frustration at Washington—it sort of reached a fever pitch last week—that we're now looking at 16 months in which there's going to be a clear contrast and a clear choice to be made.

I think people understand that—they thought maybe divided Government might make some sense. They didn't think dysfunctional Government was going to make a lot of sense, and that's what they're seeing right now. And I think the American people are not persuaded that an agenda of simply slashing commitments to things like student loan pro-

grams or privatizing or voucherizing Medicare are somehow going to be the solutions. They're not buying that bill of goods.

And what they do need to believe though is, is that the medium- and long-term solutions that we're proposing, if implemented, can actually make a difference in their lives, in their day-to-day lives. And what's also encouraging is, is that as I travel around the country or I read letters from people every single day, what I'm struck by is the core decency and common sense that so many people display.

Folks aren't paying attention to the ins and outs, day to day of every single debate that goes on here in Washington. But they have pretty good instincts and they've got good values. And they know we can do better, and they're willing to chip in. But they want to make sure that everybody else is chipping in as well.

And so I'm hoping that all of you are willing to get involved in what I think is going to be even more consequential an election than 2008 was. I think even more is at stake, partly because the alternative visions that are being presented are even starker now than I think they were before.

And I can tell you that I'm going to be fighting as hard as I can for that vision of an America that is generous and big and bold and aggressive in promoting equal opportunity for all people all across this land. And I think that that's what most of you believe in as well. So I'm looking forward to working with you.

And if you're willing to sign up and get involved, knowing that we're in for a tough fight, I promise you the American people are going to come through for us and I'm going to have 4 more years after this next year and a half, which means that I'm going to be really gray by the time I'm done. [*Laughter*]

But thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:29 p.m. at the St. Regis Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Matthew W. Barzun, national finance chair of the President's 2012 election campaign. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.