

Statement on the First Anniversary of the Repeal of the United States Military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" Policy September 20, 2012

A year ago today, we upheld the fundamental American values of fairness and equality by finally and formally repealing "don't ask, don't tell." Gay and lesbian Americans now no longer need to hide who they love in order to serve the country they love. It is a testament to the professionalism of our men and women in uniform that this change was implemented in an orderly manner, preserving unit cohesion, recruitment, retention, and military effectiveness.

As Commander in Chief, I've seen that our national security has been strengthened because we are no longer denied the skills and talents of those patriotic Americans who happen to be gay or lesbian. The ability of service-members to be open and honest about their families and the people they love honors the integrity of the individuals who serve, strengthens the institutions they serve, and is one of the many reasons why our military remains the finest in the world.

Remarks at an Obama Victory Fund 2012 Fundraiser in Tampa, Florida September 20, 2012

Hello, everybody! It is so good to see all of you, and I'm going to have a chance to, I know, take some pictures and spend a little time with you.

But let me begin by thanking Eddie Vedder for that unbelievable performance, but more importantly, for that story, which is the first time I've ever heard that story. And for you to share that with us, Eddie, I think speaks volumes not just about you and who you are, but it also speaks volumes about our country, because that story, I think, captures better than anything what this campaign is about and what this country is about. At any given moment, all of us may have challenges. At any given moment, all of us may need a helping hand. And that's not inconsistent with individual initiative and risk-taking and pursuing the American Dream. It's part and parcel of it. And so I'm so grateful for your friendship and your support, but I'm really grateful for you sharing that story with all of us. Thank you.

To Lisa and Don, thank you for opening up your extraordinary home. We are so grateful.

I want to thank Tyler Florence for all the outstanding food. And I want to acknowledge your former Governor, a great friend—and I can admit it now—Charlie Crist. I'm allowed to hug him as much as I want. *[Laughter]*

We are less than 50 days away from the election. And this is my last election, so I get nostalgic sometimes thinking about all my previous races. And my first race where Michelle and I would go door to door with these xeroxed—we'd gone to Kinko's, and we kind of printed up these little hand cards. And people would look and say, what name is this? *[Laughter]* And they couldn't pronounce it, and people wouldn't answer the door. And the campaign was run out of our kitchen in a small condo in Chicago.

And obviously, now things have changed. Our budget is a little bit bigger. Our mode of transport—as opposed to me driving around with one staff person in the passenger seat and unfolding maps and trying to figure out where I'm supposed to go, and trying to find a parking spot, and getting there and it turns out it's raining and I don't have an umbrella and so I walk into people's houses soaked—things are a little smoother for me now, I've got to admit. *[Laughter]*

But the motivation, the reason that I'm running now is no different from that first race, and it's no different than the sentiment that Eddie just expressed up here on stage. Because, like him, I've traveled the long way, but it's been an unlikely journey, and the reason

that I'm here is because this country, alone among any other country on Earth, is able to pluck the son of a single mom, without fame, without fortune, without resources, without connections, and give him the kind of education and doors of opportunity that allowed me, as long as I was willing to work hard and make some sacrifices, to make something of myself. And the same is true for Michelle. And the same is true for a number of you.

And so what's at stake, when I think about this election, is preserving or restoring that basic bargain here in America that says if you work hard, if you meet your responsibilities and if you've got some big dreams, you've got a chance to succeed. You may not succeed and become a rock 'n' roll star. [Laughter] But you've got a chance to have a home and raise a family and not go bankrupt when you get sick and contribute to your community, and most importantly, give your kids an even better chance to do better and dream bigger than you did.

And for a decade or so, it felt as if that dream was slipping away. We had seen jobs shipped overseas so that the traditional path for a lot of folks into the middle class through manufacturing jobs, that was gone. You saw incomes flatline or go down and the costs of everything from health care to college going up, people having to take on more and more debt just to keep up, and then eventually the house of cards collapsing in the worst recession since the Great Depression.

And I ran for President because that's not the story I tell myself about who we are as a nation. I still believe in that story that Eddie described, and that my own life exemplifies. And so, for the last 3½ years, everything we've done is been focused on how do we grow this economy so that everybody has got a fair shot and everybody is doing their fair share and everybody is playing by the same rules and we're growing a strong middle class, not from the top down, but from the middle out and from the bottom up.

And it's because of the resilience of the American people and the policies that we've put in place that we've been able to turn

around a situation where we were losing 800,000 jobs a month and now have seen 30 consecutive months of job growth. It's for that reason.

It's for that reason that we've been able to provide millions of students greater assistance for them to go to college. Not just 4-year colleges, but also community colleges so that they can get trained for the jobs that are hiring right now.

It's for that reason that we said it's time for us to do something about health care in this country. When we've got tens of millions of people who are at risk of going bankrupt just because somebody in their family gets sick, that's something we can change.

It's for that reason that we passed Wall Street reform, so that not only do we no longer see taxpayer-funded bailouts, but we also start seeing consumers protected from unscrupulous mortgage brokers or payday lenders, and people have a sense that they're not going to be cheated when they go into the marketplace.

It's for that reason that we've been able to double our fuel efficiency standards on cars and cut our imports of oil and begin to double our clean energy.

All these things are of a piece, because all these things are designed to try to make our economy strong and create a foundation so that, once again, anybody who works hard can make it here in this country.

Now, we've got a lot more work to do, and everybody here knows it, and certainly folks here in Florida understand that. We've got a lot of people who are still looking for work, a lot of people whose homes are still underwater. We've got communities that are struggling and storefronts that are still boarded up. And that's why this election becomes so important. Not only is our work not done, but we've got as fundamental a choice as I've seen since I've been following politics: between two different candidates, two different parties, but also, most importantly, two different visions of how we move forward.

Governor Romney and his allies in Congress think that the solution, the way we provide strong growth and opportunity, is to provide

tax cuts for folks like you. [*Laughter*] And listen, I understand nobody likes paying taxes, but that recipe we tried. We tried for a decade, and it worked very well for us, but it didn't work well for the country. The other big idea that they've got is to roll back regulations that keep our air and water clean, roll back regulations that make sure that people aren't abused in the marketplace. We tried that too, and it didn't work very well.

So we've got a different idea, and what I tried to do at the convention—I know there was one here; we had another one in Charlotte. Maybe you saw both of them. What we've said is, let's focus on how we continue to build an economy that works for middle class families and everybody who's striving to get into that middle class; how do we make sure we're providing tax breaks to companies that are investing here in Florida, here in the United States, instead of giving tax breaks to companies that are shipping jobs overseas; how do we make sure that educational opportunity works for everybody, that college is accessible, that we're hiring outstanding teachers in math and science, that we're investing in early childhood education.

How do we make sure that we're developing oil and gas resources, but we're also investing in clean energy like wind and solar that can cut our carbon, reduce our dependence on foreign oil, and is good for people's pocketbooks; and how do we reduce our deficit in a balanced way, cutting out programs that don't work. And for those of you who are Democrats, I have to confess that not every program works in Washington, and we can trim back and streamline and make Government more efficient. In fact, we have an obligation to do so. But even after we make those cuts, if we're serious about deficit reduction, we're then also going to have to ask folks who've done very well to do a little bit more and go back to the rates we had when Bill Clinton was President—which is a time, by the way, when we created 23 million new jobs, a surplus instead of a deficit, and actually created a whole lot of millionaires to boot.

Because it turns out that when you've got middle class families doing well, guess what,

they spend money. They buy cars and computers and—I was going to say CDs, but I'm dating myself. [*Laughter*] And then businesses have more profits and they hire more people, and we get into a virtuous cycle and everybody does better.

Now, at the same time as we're focused domestically, we've got some stuff internationally, obviously, that's going on. And this past week reminded us of the challenges and the threats that are still out there. I said I'd end the war in Iraq, and we did. I said we would begin winding down our commitments in Afghanistan and make sure that Afghans are taking responsibility for their own security, and that process has begun. I said we'd go after Al Qaida and bin Laden, and we did that.

But we're not done yet. We're still threatened by an Iran that is pursuing nuclear weapons, and I've been absolutely clear that our policy is not to allow Iran to get a nuclear weapon. We can't afford a nuclear arms race in the region. Obviously, there are still extremists around the world who threaten us, which is why my commitment is to continue to have the strongest military in the world. But I also want to lead with diplomacy. I also want to lead with our values and our ideals.

And I also want to make sure that we understand that if we're going to be strong abroad, we've got to do some nation-building here at home. And so take half of the money that we're spending on war to pay down the deficit and use a whole bunch of it to rebuild America, putting people back to work with roads and bridges and schools and infrastructure. All that can help us grow and ultimately will help to finance what we need to keep us safe.

So we've got a lot of work to do. And the main point I guess I want to make to you is that, this being my last campaign, I'm not going to be leaving a lot on the field. And I know we've got a football family here. I see an outstanding all-star—all-pro in the audience. And when you've got your last game, you've got to leave it all out there. And when the stakes are this high, we've got to work. We have to work.

If you believe in the course that we've put out there—if you believe that it was the right

thing to end “don’t ask, don’t tell”; if you believe that it’s the right thing to make sure that young people who are brought here and have gone to school here and pledge allegiance to the flag and understand themselves as Americans, but just don’t have the papers, that it makes no sense for us to send them to countries that they don’t even know anything about; if you believe that we have to have an economy that works for everybody and not just some—then I’m going to need you to work.

And some of you have been watching television and you know that the other side is not short on funds; they are not short on resources. I was—my campaign manager was with a couple with a young son, and they were very excited to meet the campaign manager of the Obama campaign, and they said their 3-year-old knows Obama, and said, “What does President Obama do?” And the 3-year-old says, “He approves this message”—[laughter]—which is a sign that things have gotten a little carried away.

But for the next little less than 2 months, we’re going to see more advertising, more negative messages than we’ve ever seen before. And the only way we counteract that is through the determination and passion of folks like you.

I’m confident we can win this thing, but it’s not a sure thing. And I’m going to need all of you to stretch a little bit. To the extent that I’m preaching to the choir, I need you guys to go out and do some evangelizing yourselves. Get your friends, neighbors, coworkers. It may not always be easy, but what’s more important?

I had a chance to see Lisa and Don’s young sons. Many of you have children. I think about Malia and Sasha. I want them to live in a country where they believe that if they’re willing to put in the effort, they can be a platinum-selling artist or a President of the United States or an outstanding business man or woman. I don’t want their dreams constricted. And I also don’t want our kids to think that somehow success is reserved for them, and that somehow half the country is locked out of that success.

I want everybody to be successful. Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, abled or disabled—I want everybody to have a chance to succeed. That’s what we’re fighting for in this election. That’s why I need you guys stepping up.

If you do, not only will we win Florida, we’ll win in November. We’ll finish what we started, remind the world just what it is that makes America the greatest nation on Earth.

Thank you everybody. I’ll see you inside. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:16 p.m. at the residence of Lisa DeBartolo and Don Miggs. In his remarks, he referred to Republican Presidential nominee W. Mitt Romney; J. Oronde “Ronde” Barber, cornerback, National Football League’s Tampa Bay Buccaneers; James A. Messina, manager, Obama 2012 re-election campaign; and Jasper and Milo DeBartolo Miggs, sons of Ms. DeBartolo and Mr. Miggs.

Remarks to the AARP 2012 Life@50+ National Event and a Question-and-Answer Session in New Orleans, Louisiana September 21, 2012

The President. Thank you, Jane. Thank you, AARP. I want to thank Barry and the entire AARP for everything you do on behalf of America’s seniors.

And today is especially poignant for me I think because I can’t help to think about my grandmother Madelyn Dunham. During World War II, she worked on a bomber assembly line, with a baby at home, while her hus-

band was off serving his country. And in the postwar years, she worked her way from a secretary to vice president at her local bank. And later, she helped raise my mother and then obviously helped raise me and my sister.

She was a great citizen who lived up to her responsibilities. And after a lifetime of hard work, what she hoped for in return was to be able to live out her golden years with dignity