

Remarks at a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Fundraiser in Beverly Hills, California
November 25, 2013

The President. Hello, everybody. Well, I am just thrilled to be back in California, thrilled to be back in L.A., and thrilled to be with my great friend, Magic Johnson, and Cookie. We thank them so much for their hospitality. This is just an extraordinary place. But more importantly, they've just got an extraordinary spirit, and to accommodate us for this cause means a lot to us.

There are a couple other people I want to acknowledge. First of all, Andre and Lisa and Elisa, thank you so much for letting us crash here also. [Laughter]

We've got some wonderful Members of Congress who are here today, and I just want you all to give them a big round of applause. Janice Hahn is here. Mark Takano is here. Scott Peters is here. Linda Sanchez is here. And Alan Lowenthal is here. And they all do a great job on behalf of the people of California.

Audience member. I love you.

The President. I love you back. [Laughter]

Now, a couple of things I just want to say before I start talking issues and politics. On the ride over, I've got a wonderful writer, David Remnick, who's following me around right now. And he actually started as a sports reporter before he became the editor of the New Yorker. So not surprisingly, even though he was supposed to be asking me about Iran, as we were driving over here, he starts saying, "So what about Magic?" [Laughter] And "What does this mean to you?" And I said, first of all, understand, I was a 76ers fan. [Laughter]

Audience members. No!

The President. No, look, I'm not one of these people—hold on. I do not go to different cities and tell them, man, I love the Lakers, I love the Celtics. [Laughter] I'm not one of those people who just says what you want to hear. I was a 76ers fan because Dr. J, when I was 12, 13, 14 years old, that was my guy. And so when he went to the 76ers, I became a fan of his. Now, I became a fan of Magic's when he

was in college at Michigan State, but I couldn't just suddenly shift and be a fair-weather friend to the Doctor. [Laughter]

So when Magic, in game 6, scores 42, playing center because Kareem was hurt—

Former National Basketball Association Player Earvin "Magic" Johnson, Jr. —rebounds.

The President. I remember the stats. You don't need to remind me of that. [Laughter] And if I didn't, then down in Magic's trophy room, I promise, it's all printed out. [Laughter]

So you watch this career unfold, and it's a magical career. And the championships and "Showtime," and for anybody who loves basketball as much as me, there's nobody who is a bigger icon than Magic Johnson. But this is all by way of saying, when David asked me, "What does this mean, being with Magic?" what I said is, as much as I admired his basketball career, what I think about Magic, what I actually think about are two things. One is, when the incredibly difficult circumstances of his HIV diagnosis comes up, the way he handles that doesn't just empower folks who are dealing with that illness, doesn't just help put research dollars in there, doesn't just educate the public, it moves the country and the world to think in an entirely new way that ends up changing the face of this country and our attitudes with the kind of grace and courage that only true leaders can display. That's number one.

And number two, Magic has become our prime example of somebody who was blessed with incredible fame and fortune from a sports career and understood his next step is to build institutions and businesses and employ people, and go into communities that folks said weren't worth anything and suddenly find that they're worth a whole lot if somebody is willing to invest in them.

And so it's for those two reasons that I'm proud to call Magic Johnson a friend. Also keep in mind, the last time Magic played basketball was with me at my 49th birthday par-

ty—[laughter]—and I just want to tell you, it wasn't pretty. [Laughter] But we all love him, and obviously, this city loves him. And now the Dodgers love him. [Laughter] And he just continues to be the Prince of the City.

Now, the reason we're here tonight, though, is because this country has gone through some very difficult times over the last 5 years, as tough a stretch as we've seen in my lifetime: a great recession that almost tipped into depression, a financial crisis that led to people losing homes and jobs and made them less certain about the future. We've gone through two wars; terrorist attacks. We've got concerns about climate change. We have worries about whether or not our politics and our country can work in a way that is up to all these challenges.

But I'm here to tell you I'm optimistic about the future. And the reason I'm optimistic is, when you look at American history, some way, somehow, we always are able to confront our challenges. Sometimes not right away, sometimes we take a couple steps back before we move forward, but eventually, we come together to reaffirm the ideals that helped build this country in the first place. The idea that in this country, it doesn't matter what you look like, where you come from, what your last name is, who you love. If you're willing to work hard, if you embrace the values that are at the heart of the American experience, then you can succeed. You can make it if you try in this country.

And all of us are invested in making sure that everybody gets a fair shot. And whether it's been the struggle for civil rights or women's rights or workers' rights, whether it's been us moving west and moving from an agricultural society to an industrial society, now an information society, we embrace change, and we don't shy away from it. And we just keep on going until eventually we find ourselves on the other side more prosperous, more peaceful, more diverse, more fair, more just than we were before.

And I have no doubt that that's going to be true for this generation and for the next generation because that's in our DNA. That's who we are. But that success, that achievement, what makes us exceptional, doesn't happen on

its own. It happens because, collectively, we come together and we're willing to work for it.

And more than anything, that's what's needed right now: that sense that we're in this together and that each of us can achieve incredible individual success, but we have some obligations to each other. And most of the arguments that are taking place in Washington right now have to do with whether or not we are going to continue to vindicate those values and those ideals that built this country.

When I talk about providing early childhood education to every child in America, that's not just an education issue. That is an economic issue, and it is a moral issue. Are we willing to invest to make sure every child, whether that kid's name is Earvin or that kid's name is Barack or José—it doesn't matter—will that child, if they're willing to work hard, be able to succeed?

When I talk about rebuilding our infrastructure in this country—our roads, our bridges, our ports, our broadband lines, our smart grid—it's not just a issue of what's good for our economy and the fact that it would put people back to work right now and lay the foundation for future economic growth. It's also a recognition that this generation has to invest so that future generations can succeed.

I just came from San Francisco, and you fly over the Golden Gate Bridge. That didn't just happen. There was a generation that said, we can imagine doing great things together not just for ourselves, but for future generations. When I talk about the Affordable Care Act, all the fighting that we've been having to do, it's not just a matter of dollars and cents and why it's good for the economy to make sure that people aren't going to emergency rooms—because that's the most expensive care—and why the only way we're going to lower health care costs over the long term is if we start delivering health care smarter. It's also a values question. Do we want to live in a country as wealthy as we are, where if somebody gets sick, they lose their home, they go bankrupt? They have to weigh, can I go right now to the emergency room, knowing that that may mean I can't pay for my child's school tuition?

That's not the country I want to live in. And that's not the country that you want to live in, which means that we've got to fight for it. And when we end "don't ask, don't tell," it's not just because we won't have an effective military unless we field the very best people regardless of sexual orientation. It's also a larger question of whether or not in this country you can serve the country you love regardless of who you love. It's a values question.

So most of the debates that we're having right now on budgets, on whether we're investing in research and science, whether we are going to pass immigration reform so that we continue to be a land that welcomes strivers from all around the world and continually replenishing the vibrancy of this country, whether we're talking about making sure that our civil rights laws are enforced and making sure that we're protecting our planet from the potential ravages of climate change—these aren't just technical questions, they're values questions. It has to do with what do we stand for, who are we as a people, and what are we going to leave for the next generation.

Because it turns out that, look, there are some very hard, tough policy questions, but most of the time, we've got good answers. We know what works. And what's stopping us is a failure of our politics and a lack of ambition. And we shy away from what might be hard. And our politics all too often encourages people to think selfishly or short-term. And that's what the debate in Washington is about, and that's what the debate in this country generally is about right now.

Now, what makes me optimistic is every time we come to these crossroads where we've got to move forward, we eventually do. Sometimes, we try everything else until we do, but we eventually do. And I have no doubt that we're going to do so this time as well. I'm confident we're going to get immigration reform passed sooner or later, because it's the right thing to do. And I expect it to be soon.

I am confident that we are going to continue to improve our education system and make sure that every young person in America can succeed in this 21st-century economy. I am

confident that all of us who have kids or nieces or nephews, that we're going to say to ourselves that we don't want a planet that is destroyed because we haven't been willing to increase fuel efficiency standards or double down on clean energy or invest in the research necessary to keep carbon out of the atmosphere. I'm absolutely sure we're going to make sure this country provides affordable health care for every single American. And if I have to fight for another 3 years to make sure that happens, I will do so.

And we're going to make sure that we've got an economy that doesn't just benefit the few at the top, but an economy that provides growth and broad-based prosperity. Magic has become a great businessman, and some of his partners are here, but one thing they all understand is that if your customers are doing well, then you'll do well. If workers are getting paid a decent wage with decent benefits and have some sense of security, then that money comes back to business.

And there are certain things we can do to promote a growth agenda generally, because it really is true that a rising tide can lift a lot of boats; it makes it a lot easier to lift all those boats. But it's also true that we've got to make sure we've got an economy in which everybody from the boardroom down to the factory floor—the folks in the corner office, but also the folks cleaning the corner office—that they have a chance to make it.

And that's what we're fighting for. So ultimately, the only way this happens, though, is with the support and faith and effort of all of you. Every politician uses sports analogies, even if they didn't play sports. My basketball career ended in high school. [Laughter] I probably could have finagled my way onto a Division III team, but that was about as far as I could have gone. But when I watch Malia and Sasha play sports—and I've encouraged them and occasionally coached them—one of the things I tell them is, even if you're not talented like Magic Johnson, what sports will teach you is the concept of team, the idea of a group of individuals molding themselves into a unit to

achieve a goal, to pursue something that is important and that individually we can't achieve.

And part of what made Magic Johnson one of the greatest of all time—there were folks who scored more than he did, and there were folks who were faster than he was, but nobody played a team game better than he did. And that's, more than anything, what we need right now in this country, is a sense that we are in this together and we are pursuing this thing, this objective: an America that is more prosperous and more peaceful and is growing together. That's what we're fighting for. And that's not a Democratic thing or a Republican thing, that's an American thing.

But I am very proud of the fact that those values are at the heart of the Democratic Party and all the Democrats who are here as Congress—as Members of Congress. And so when you support them, you are part of the team.

We're going to need you, because this is going to be a big fight. And it's not one that's go-

ing to be finished; there's no shot clock on this. You've just got to keep on going. [Laughter] And it requires endurance, and it requires persistence. But at the end of the day, I'm confident we're going to be victorious. And the reason I'm confident is because of all of you.

So thank you for your support tonight. Don't let up. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:47 p.m. at the residence of Earvin "Magic" Johnson, Jr., and Earlitha "Cookie" Johnson. In his remarks, he referred to Elisa Johnson, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Johnson; Andre and Lisa Johnson, son and daughter-in-law of Mr. Johnson; and former National Basketball Association players Julius W. "Dr. J" Erving II and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 26. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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Thank you. All right, everybody. Have a seat. That's enough, that's enough. [Laughter]

Now, let me clarify something. First of all, there was valet parking—[laughter]—for Cheryl. We thought it was appropriate for Haim to get some exercise. [Laughter] Cheryl, being the wonderful person that she is, declined the valet parking, and so she might have joined him. But I would have been happy to have her drive right up into the South Lawn. [Laughter]

We are so grateful for Haim and Cheryl, not just for this event, but for the extraordinary friendship and their persistent advocacy on behalf of so many issues that we all care about. And not only to Cheryl and Haim, but Tiffany and Heidi and Ness and Tanya, and Cheryl's parents and her aunt who are here, we want to say thank you for your generosity and thank you for your friendship. We are thankful.

Now, I understand Harry Reid was here, but Harry left. But I'll tell you what, although

Harry may not win sort of any contest for best sound bite on CNN—[laughter]—if you're in a fight, you want Harry Reid in your corner. And nobody has fought harder for the American people and for working families in this country than Harry, with the possible exception of the person who has been one of the finest Speakers that we've ever had and who I intend to see Speaker once again, Nancy Pelosi.

Harry and Nancy could not do the great work that they were doing unless they had an incredible team around them. Two of the people who have, let's face it, fairly thankless jobs, but also happen to be some of the finest public servants that we have in the country: Michael Bennet, the head of the DSCC; Steve Israel leading the charge at the DCCC. We want to thank them for the great work that they are doing.

And one of my favorite people who has just been an incredible source of laughter and