

Remarks at a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Lunch in La Jolla, California

May 8, 2014

Thank you. Well, first of all, let me just say thank you to Irwin and Joan and the whole Jacobs family. They have been great friends for, as Irwin noted, a very long time. Although, I am reminded of the story that Lincoln told. When Lincoln was President, anybody could line up and just wait and potentially get an audience with the President; the Secret Service was not active in the same fashion back then. Finally, a guy comes, and he says, “Listen, I’ve been one of your supporters, I worked hard, made sure that you were on the ballot, did everything possible.” And Lincoln stopped him, and he said, “Sir, are you saying that you’re responsible for my Presidency?” And he says yes. And Lincoln says, “I forgive you.” [*Laughter*]

Part of the reason why it is so wonderful to see Irwin and Joan, whether it’s in Washington or here, is their story embodies America. Their story says something about California. We were talking earlier about the two of them being at MIT in the engineering department and coming out here for a couple of days. And originally, the thought was, maybe you’d come out here and you’d start up this engineering department in this new school in the Wild West, in San Diego—there’s not much around. And they thought, well, that’s a bad idea. MIT, one of the greatest institutions in the world, why would I leave that? And apparently, after a couple of days, they said, oh, maybe this is really not so bad. [*Laughter*]

And then for Irwin not only to help establish one of the finest engineering schools in the country, but then to be able to use his incredible gifts to do well by doing good and helping to revolutionize all of our lives through his innovations—that’s what we’re about. That’s what America is about. And so being here with them today reminds me of what it is that makes America so special. And so we’re very grateful to them. [*Applause*] Absolutely. And they’ve got some really good-looking grandkids—[*laughter*]*—that I had a chance to meet.*

I also want to acknowledge somebody who is a great friend of middle class families, working families, people who are striving, people who are working hard and just want to try to pass on something a little bit better to their kids, and also somebody who always has my back and who I couldn’t be prouder to be friends with as well as working colleagues. Not only did we accomplish a great deal when she was Speaker, we’re going to accomplish that much more once we get her back in: Nancy Pelosi is here.

And finally, I want to acknowledge not an elected official, but somebody who has an even tougher job: a spouse of an elected official. Where did Lynn go? There’s Lynn. And her son Ben is right there. Some of you know that Scott Peters is our Congressman here, and he couldn’t be here because he is actually doing his job. [*Laughter*] But Scott is an example of the kind of people we want in Washington: there for the right reasons, there with the right values in a tough district. And that’s the reason we’re here today, is to make sure that all of you understand the urgency of the moment.

I’m going to speak relatively briefly because I think we’ve got some time for questions. Is that correct? Did I get that right? I hope so. Okay. [*Laughter*]

When I came into office, the American economy was in a freefall that people don’t still fully appreciate. By a number of economic indicators, things were collapsing faster than they did in 1929. The pace of job loss was unbelievable. The financial system worldwide was on the brink of collapse. And by most measures, what we’ve accomplished together as a country over the last 5 years has been significant: 9.2 million new jobs, an auto industry that has come roaring back, a financial system that’s stabilized, trillions of dollars of wealth recovered and restored because housing came back and people’s 401 pensions bounced back. We’ve been able to double the amount of clean energy that we produce. We’ve been able to increase fuel efficiency standards on cars, reduce

the amount of carbon that we were emitting faster than any of the other developed countries around the world.

By a lot of measures, we've made real progress. And yet what we also know is that the American public is anxious. They're worried, partly because they remember what happened in 2007 and 2008, and the shocks that they experienced in their own lives: seeing, if they didn't lose their job, maybe somebody in their family lost their job; if they didn't lose their home, maybe somebody in their family lost their home; or their own homes they saw plummeting in value. But also because, for a couple of decades now, even when we're growing, even when corporate profits are soaring, incomes, wages have not gone up. For most of us in this room who have done extraordinarily well, we've done even better during these periods. But for ordinary Americans, growths in productivity, the incredible innovation and transformation of our economy hasn't translated into greater financial security. It hasn't translated into the sense that the next generation can do what Irwin did and what Joan did—that maybe our horizons are more limited. That's how people feel.

And part of what contributes to that is the sense that nobody in Washington cares about them or what people in Washington care about is their own jobs, their own positions, their own perks, squabbling between the two parties. And so not only have we seen in Congress—in particular, over the last 3 to 4 years—an utter failure to address the concerns of ordinary middle class families, but that reinforces, then, people's sense that there's no point in us getting involved at all and increases apathy or a lack of confidence in our Government.

Now, those are the facts. But here's both the challenge and the opportunity: It doesn't have to be that way. The truth of the matter is, is that the reason that we have not seen Washington address the core concerns of too many working families around the country is that you have a party that has been captive to an ideology—to a theory of economics—that says those folks, they're on their own, and government doesn't have an appropriate role to play.

And our goal and our task in this midterm has to be to break that grip, that particular view, that particular wrongheaded vision this country has so that we can get back to the business of investing in the American people and investing in America's future.

And we can do it, because on issue after issue, the majority of Americans actually agree with us. The majority of Americans think we should be raising the minimum wage. If you work full time in this country, you shouldn't be living in poverty. In fact, a significant plurality of Republicans agree with that.

The majority of Americans think that you should get paid equal for equal work, that women shouldn't be paid less than men, and that there should be enforcement of that. Republicans don't agree with it, but the American people do.

The majority of American people think we should reform a broken immigration system that can help reduce our deficits, create more growth, create more innovation, and even as we are securing our borders and making sure we're a nation of laws, we're also reminding ourselves that we're a nation of immigrants and that's what makes this country so special. Republicans, so far, at least, haven't been willing to step up. To their credit, some in the Senate have. But the House Republicans have stubbornly refused to even allow a vote on the issue.

The majority of Americans think that we should be investing in education, in early childhood education, in making sure that more young people have access to college, to making sure that we're investing in developing more science and math teachers and engineering students, because they understand innovation is vital to our growth. They think we should be investing more in basic research that allows for that innovation to take place. The Republican budget slashes all those things.

So the American people are on our side on the issues; they just have lost faith that we can actually make it happen. And this is where the challenge comes in. In order for us to not simply play defense, but actually go back on the offensive on behalf of the American people, on

behalf of striving families all across this country, including right here in California, we've got to have folks like Nancy Pelosi guiding the debate. And the only way that happens is if we feel the same sense of urgency about midterms as we do for Presidential elections.

The Democrats have a congenital disease: We get really excited about Presidential elections, and then during midterms, we fall asleep. And partly, it's the nature of our voters. We're disproportionately young, disproportionately minority, disproportionately working class. Folks are busy. They've got a lot of stuff going on. And so we tend to drop off during midterms. That's what happened in 2010.

And I promised Michelle in 2012 this is going to be my last campaign. It turns out, I had to say to her, "Honey, I've got one more." Because on every issue that people here care about, whether it's climate change or women's reproductive health or rebuilding our infrastructure or basic research, we are not going to be able to make the kind of progress we need—regardless of how hard I push, regardless of how many administrative actions I take—we're not going to be able to go where we need to go and can go and should go unless I've got a Congress that's willing to work with me.

I've said before, and I'll say again: I'm willing to work with Republicans on any of these issues. But you've got to believe in climate change to want to work with me on climate change. [Laughter] You've got to believe that there is a problem with equal pay in order to work with me to vindicate that value. And right now we don't have that.

So I am going to need everybody here to feel the same sense of urgency as so many of you showed when I was running in 2008 and 2012. This is a priority. Not for me, I'm not going to be on the ballot. It is a priority for you and your children and your grandchildren. Because if we do the things that we need to do, if we make the investments we need to make, then the 21st century is going to be the American century just like the previous one.

And if we don't, then the anxieties of so many Americans are going to be justified. And that's not the kind of America we want to live in. We want an America that is hopeful and growing and dynamic and vital and diverse and tolerant and vindicates the values of equality and fraternity that are so important to our history. That's the better future. That's the one we have to choose. But it's going to require all of us to do our work in this midterm election.

And I know I'm preaching to the choir, because otherwise you wouldn't be here. But I'm going to need you to go out there and talk to your friends and neighbors and your coworkers. And even if they argue back a little bit, you'll be armed with the facts. The truth is on your side on this, and this is a righteous cause.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:47 p.m. at the residence of Irwin M. and Joan K. Jacobs. In his remarks, he referred to Lynn E. Gorguze, president and chief executive officer, Cameron Holdings Corp., and her son Ben Peters. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Message to the Congress Transmitting the Agreement for Cooperation Between the United States and Vietnam on the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy

May 8, 2014

To the Congress of the United States:

I am pleased to transmit to the Congress, pursuant to sections 123 b. and 123 d. of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, as amended (42 U.S.C. 2153(b), (d)) (the "Act"), the text of a

proposed Agreement for Cooperation between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam Concerning Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy (the "Agreement"). I am also pleased to transmit my written approval, au-