

what I can to make sure the system works better.

Thank you, guys.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:09 p.m. in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he re-

ferred to President Bashar al-Asad of Syria; and Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh C. Johnson. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), an alternative designation for the ISIL terrorist organization. A reporter referred to President Fuad Masum of Iraq.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser in Purchase, New York

August 29, 2014

Thank you, everybody. How is everybody doing? I just want to begin by saying thank you to the Wolf family. As Robert mentioned, he and Carol and Luke and James, they have been great friends for years now. I don't think I was ever behind Dennis Kucinich in the polls. [Laughter] That doesn't ring a bell. But it is true that Robert was a huge supporter before a lot of people knew how to pronounce my name. And anybody who is a friend of Robert's knows that once he's your friend, he doesn't stop. He's there for you through thick and thin, and I could not be prouder to know him.

You also have an outstanding Congresswoman here: Nita Lowey is here. Where did Nita go? There she is. We love Nita.

You know, it's a little warm in here. I'm going to take off my jacket. My tan suit is a lot cooler. [Laughter] This one is a little warmer. But let me just—let me start off by saying this: Robert mentioned what things were like when I was first starting politically, when I had first broken on the national scene, but I want to talk a little bit about what things were like right before I was President.

At the time, we were in the midst of two wars, and we were about to plunge into the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. And when Ronald Reagan ran in 1984, and first in 1980, he asked a simple question: Are you better off than you were 4 years ago? And the one thing that I can say is that because of the incredible resilience and strength of the American people, but also because we made some good decisions even though they were

tough at the time, we are better off as a country than we were when I came into office.

And when you think about what was happening then, we were losing 800,000 jobs a month. The economy was actually contracting at a faster pace than had happened during the Great Depression. Today, we've now seen 53 straight months of job growth, over 10 million jobs created. Unemployment rate has come down faster this year than any time in the last 30 years. The deficit has been cut by more than half. We have seen record corporate profits. The stock market has not just recovered, but actually gone well beyond where we were pre-crisis.

Our energy production here in America is higher than it's ever been. For the first time in maybe 20 years, we actually produce more energy than we import. We're producing twice as much clean energy as we were when I came into office, 10 times more solar energy, 3 times more wind energy, which partly accounts for why we reduced carbon emissions faster than any other advanced country in the world. The housing market has moved in the right direction. And across the board, around the world, when investors are now asked what's the best place to invest anywhere in the world, for 2 years running now, and the first time in a decade, people no longer say China, they say the United States of America. That's what we've accomplished working together.

And that doesn't include things like education reform and expanding access to college for millions of young people and capping their debt repayments every month so that they can

take teaching jobs or social work jobs and still afford to pursue their dreams. That doesn't include the incredible progress that we've made in terms of LGBT rights and marriage equality. We are a more prosperous nation and a fairer nation, a more just nation than we were when I came into office.

Now, having said all that, a lot of people still feel anxious. And the question then is, why is it that if things have gotten better, why are people anxious? Why is there still disquiet across the country? Why is it that people feel cynical about the possibilities for the future? And I'd offer three reasons.

The first is that although the economy as a whole has done well, there are still too many folks who have been left behind. Those of us at the very top have done very well. But there are still a lot of people out there out of work; still a lot of people who, at the end of the month, are struggling to pay the bills; still a lot of families who work really hard every single day, but can't figure out how to pay for childcare or can't imagine how they're going to save for their kids' college education or have no idea how they're going to retire. Corporate profits have gone up, stock market has gone up, but wages and incomes have barely budged—not just in the last 6 years, but in the last 20 years.

And so there's a sense that the compact that has held this country together—the idea that the economy grows from the bottom up and the middle out and that if you work hard, no matter who you are or where you start or what you look like, what faith you belong to, that you can make it if you try—that basic notion people feel more skeptical about.

And that's why, for the last 6 years and for the next 2 that I am President, we are going to continue to focus on basic steps that can strengthen the middle class and provide more ladders for people to get into the middle class. Making sure we've got early childhood education in place, because we know that gives us a good bang for the buck. Making sure that college is more affordable for more young people, because we know there's no better investment to be in the middle class and stay there than a college education. Making sure, yes, that we

continue to provide affordable, quality health care to every single American so they don't go bankrupt when they get sick, and making sure the health care system works better for people. Making sure that childcare is accessible and family leave is available so that ordinary families who are doing the right thing feel like they've got a little bit of support.

And some of those efforts are going to cost money. But the truth is, is that we've also got a whole bunch of corporate loopholes out there that could be closed and a tax system that doesn't work. And if all of us are doing our fair share, then all of us can do well, not just some of us. And that is what America is about, and that's what I'm about. And that's what we're going to keep on fighting for for the next couple of years.

Second reason people are feeling anxious is that if you watch the nightly news, it feels like the world is falling apart. [Laughter] Now, let me say this: We are living through some extraordinarily challenging times. A lot of it has to do with changes that are taking place in the Middle East in which an old order that had been in place for 50 years, 60 years, 100 years was unsustainable and was going to break up at some point. And now what we are seeing is the old order not working, but the new order not being born yet. And it is a rocky road through that process and a dangerous time through that process.

So we've seen the barbarity of an organization like ISIL that is building off what happened with Al Qaida and 9/11, an extension of that same mentality that doesn't reflect Islam, but rather just reflects savagery and extremism and intolerance. We've seen divisions within the Muslim community between the Shia and Sunni. We continue to see an unwillingness to acknowledge the right of Israel to exist and its ability to defend itself. And we have seen, frankly, in this region, economies that don't work. So you've got tons of young people who see no prospect and no hope for the future and are attracted to some of these ideologies.

All of that makes things pretty frightening. And then, you turn your eyes to Europe and you see the President of Russia making a deci-

sion to look backwards instead of forward and encroaching on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of their neighbors and reasserting the notion that might means right. And I can see why a lot of folks are troubled.

But—and here’s the main message I have for you—the truth of the matter is, is that American military superiority has never been greater compared to other countries. Our men and women in uniform are more effective, better trained, better equipped than they have ever been. We have, since 9/11, built up the capacity to defend ourselves from terrorist attacks. It doesn’t mean the threat isn’t there and we can’t be—we don’t have to be vigilant, but it means that we are much less vulnerable than we were 10 or 12 or 15 years ago.

And the truth of the matter is, is that the world has always been messy. In part, we’re just noticing now because of social media and our capacity to see in intimate detail the hardships that people are going through. The good news is that American leadership has never been more necessary and there’s really no competition out there for the ideas and the values that can create the sort of order that we need in this world.

I hear people sometimes saying, well, I don’t know, China is advancing. But I tell you what, if you look at our cards and you look at China’s cards, I promise you you’d rather have ours. People say that, I don’t know, Russia looks pretty aggressive right now. But Russia’s economy is going nowhere. Here’s a quick test for you: Are there long lines of people trying to emigrate into Russia? [Laughter] I don’t think so.

Yes, the Middle East is challenging, but the truth is, it’s been challenging for quite a while. And our values, our leadership, our military power, but also our diplomatic power, the power of our culture is one that means we will get through these challenging times just like we have in the past. And I promise you, things are much less dangerous now than they were 20 years ago, 25 years ago, or 30 years ago.

This is not something that is comparable to the challenges we faced during the cold war. This is not comparable to the challenges that we faced when we had an entire block of Com-

munist countries that were trying to do us in. This is something we can handle, because we are Americans and that’s what we do. And around the world, when you travel to Asia or you travel to Europe or you travel to Latin America or you travel to Africa, what you find is, among ordinary people, they are still looking to America as a beacon of hope and opportunity. And we should not forget that.

Which brings me to the last reason that people are anxious, and that is that Washington doesn’t work. It’s hard to describe how unproductive this Congress is. Harry Truman campaigned against what was known—what he called the “do-nothing Congress.” But compared to this Congress, that was a do-a-whole-lot Congress. [Laughter]

And I have to tell you that, you know what, Democrats aren’t perfect. We’ve got our own foibles. Democratic politicians, like all politicians, they’re concerned about getting reelected. But the truth of the matter is, there’s one reason why Congress is as broken as it is, and that is that the other party has become captive to the most ideologically rigid, most unproductive, most cynical group that I have ever seen.

They don’t seem to be interested in getting things done. They seem constantly interested in the next election as opposed to the next generation. And that’s not inherent in the Republican Party. I come from Illinois. My favorite President was the first Republican President, a guy named Abraham Lincoln. But that is what is happening now.

So the reason all of you are here today is because you understand it doesn’t have to be that way. There has been a certain cynical genius to what some of these folks have done in Washington. What they’ve realized is, if we don’t get anything done, then people are going to get cynical about government and its possibilities of doing good for everybody. And since they don’t believe in government, that’s a pretty good thing. And the more cynical people get, the less they vote. And if turnout is low and people don’t vote, that pretty much benefits those who benefit from the status quo.

And so the fact that they haven’t gotten anything done shouldn’t be that surprising, but it

should also not feed your cynicism. It should feed a determination to want to get out there and have something better. And that is something that I cannot do alone. I've got to do it with all of you.

I was in a meeting earlier today, and somebody asked: "You know, Mr. President, what can you do? These folks, they just—all they do is just oppose whatever you propose even if they used to be for it, now they're against it. If you said the sky was blue, they'd say it was green. They deny the facts; they don't have any ideas for growing the economy or helping the middle class. Maybe you just need to announce a state of emergency." I said: "Well, now, I'm not going to do that. That's not how the Constitution works." [Laughter] I said to them, "You know, there's actually a solution to this that our Founders envisioned, and that is, people being involved citizens and getting out there and voting and bringing about change through the ballot box."

And we have the opportunity to do that during these midterms. And the young people here especially, some of whom may be eligible to vote for the first time, you've got to understand, this is your country. It doesn't work unless you are involved. It doesn't work unless you assert what you believe in, your values, your ideals. If you get cynical and you just say, well, you know what, it's not going to make any difference, then we'll continue to have this kind of dysfunctional government and we will not be able to tackle the issues that you care about, like climate change or making sure that the economy is working for everybody or making sure that college is affordable. We won't be able to do those things.

So my challenge to all of you is to make sure that this midterm election you're paying attention and you are engaged and you're involved. Even though there's no Presidential election yet, don't wait until 2016. You've got to get involved now. Because even if you agree with your President, you've got to have a Congress to work with your President in order to make things happen and deliver on the promises that all of us share.

So my closing comment—and this, again, is directed to the young people. And I say this

sometimes—there was one young lady here who was a White House intern a couple of years ago. And I meet with the White House interns at the end of their 6-month stint, and they ask me questions. And usually they ask things like, how do you stay in shape? Is Bo as sweet as he looks? [Laughter]

But sometimes, they just ask about, as young people, what advice would you give me? And I typically tell them, number one, nothing is handed to you; you've got to work hard. I said, number two, don't just focus on what you want to be, focus on what you want to do, what you want to accomplish; focus on something you care about that's important and is not just about you.

But the third thing I tell them is, be hopeful. And I say to them, if there was any moment in human history in which you could be born, and you didn't know who you were going to be ahead of time—you didn't know whether you were going to be Bill Gates or some poor child in a slum in Calcutta—and you just asked, when is it that you would want to be alive, at what moment? The answer, without hesitation, should be right now, because the world has never been wealthier or healthier. It's never been more tolerant. It's never been better educated. It's never been more connected.

Yes, there are dangers. Yes, there are challenges. But they're all challenges we can meet, as long as you choose to meet them. I'm ready to work with you. Let's make it happen.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:49 p.m. at the residence of Robert and Carol Wolf. In his remarks, he referred to Luke and James Wolf, sons of Mr. and Mrs. Wolf; former Rep. Dennis J. Kucinich, in his capacity as a 2008 Democratic Presidential candidate; President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; and William H. Gates III, founder, technology adviser, and board member, Microsoft Corp. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.