

## Remarks at a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Fundraiser in Newport, Rhode Island August 29, 2014

*The President.* Thank you, everybody. Thank you. Please, please, everybody sit down. Well, it is wonderful to see everybody in this just incredible setting. And I want to begin by thanking Rick and Betty for their incredible hospitality. Thank you so much. You couldn't be more gracious hosts, even arranging for perfect weather as we came in. [*Laughter*] So I know Valerie Jarrett took a picture of the sunset, which turned out very nicely on her smartphone. She is very pleased. [*Laughter*]

Couple other people I want to acknowledge, because this State has an incredible congressional delegation. We are incredibly proud of them. Your Senators: Jack Reed, who I saw at the airport, couldn't be here this evening; and your own Sheldon Whitehouse, who is here. Where's Sheldon? There he is.

You also have some terrific Members of the House of Representatives: Jim Langevin—where's Jim? There he is—and David Cicilline. Where's David? [*Applause*] Both of whom brought their mothers here today, so we thank their mothers for the outstanding job that they did.

I want to thank all the State legislators and mayors who are here. I want to thank Steve Israel, who has done tireless if thankless work as the head of the DCCC. Thank you for the great job you've done.

And a woman I love—she's spoken for, as am I—but I do love her, because she is tenacious, brilliant, tough, a master politician, and somebody who deserves to once again be Speaker of the House: Nancy Pelosi. Love Nancy.

So, because this is an intimate setting, I want to have the opportunity to have a conversation with you. I'll just make a few brief remarks at the top.

First of all, I kind of liked that suit yesterday. [*Laughter*]

*Audience member.* You looked good, Mr. President.

*The President.* I thought so. [*Laughter*] And I appreciate you honoring me by wearing a tan suit this evening, Sheldon. [*Laughter*] You know what, you cling to every last bit of summer that you can.

Second of all, obviously, I'm at the tail end of what has been an extraordinary journey, and it makes you reflect. And so I continually think about where we were when I started as President and where we are now.

When we started, we were plunging into the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, in some measures, actually worse than what was going on in '29 and '30. When we started, we were still in the midst of two wars. When we started, millions of people had no prospect of health insurance. When we started, the law of the land still allowed our military to kick people out because of who they loved.

And over the last 6 years, in large part because of the leadership of Nancy Pelosi in the first couple, and then our continued battle on behalf of middle class families in subsequent years, what we've seen is 53 straight months of job growth; the lowest unemployment rate since 2007—it's actually gone down faster this past year than any time in the last 30 years; a stock market more than recovered, which means people's 401(k)s and their retirement more secure; housing rebounding; an auto industry essentially back from the dead, hasn't been stronger in decades; millions of people who didn't have health insurance having health insurance, while at the same time health care costs and health care inflation rising at the lowest levels in 50 years; our deficit cut by more than half; our energy production higher than it's ever been—we're now actually producing more than we import for the first time in two decades; a doubling of clean energy production; a tenfold increase in solar energy, threefold increase in wind power; the most significant reductions in carbon emissions of any advanced economies, including Europe.

We have seen the highest high school graduation records on level, the highest college enrollment rates on record. We've expanded college access for millions of young people through the Pell grant program—named after a pretty good Member of the Senate. [*Applause*] We've been able to cap loan repayments at 10 percent of a graduate's income so that they can go into helping professions like teaching and social work that don't pay a lot of money. We've ended two wars. We have ended "don't ask, don't tell."

And so, objectively speaking, we are significantly better off than we were when Nancy and I first got together back in 2008. Now, despite that, there's anxiety across the country, a disquiet, and in some cases, pessimism. And the question is, why, if we're moving in the right direction, people don't feel it. And there are three reasons I would suggest.

Number one, the economy hasn't benefited everybody. The truth of the matter is, is some long-term trends over the last two decades have meant that the average person's wages and incomes have flatlined and people feel more insecure. Most of the people in this room have seen significant increases in their incomes and wealth. But the average working stiff is still thinking about paying the mortgage, still thinking about making ends meet at the end of the month, still worried about the rise in food prices and gas prices, and isn't sure whether their child, no matter how hard they work, will be able to achieve the same kinds of things that they were able to achieve because of opportunity in America. So that makes people nervous about the long term and a number of people nervous about the here and now.

Number two, internationally, we're going through a tumultuous time. And I don't have to tell you, anybody who has been watching TV this summer, it seems like it is just wave after wave of upheaval, most of it surrounding the Middle East. You're seeing a change in the order in the Middle East. But the old order is having a tough time holding together, and the new order has yet to be born, and in the interim, it's scary.

The good news is that we actually have a unprecedented military capacity and since 9/11 have built up a security apparatus that makes us in the here and now pretty safe. We have to be vigilant, but this doesn't immediately threaten the homeland. What it does do, though, is it gives a sense, once again, for future generations: Is the world going to be upended in ways that affect our kids and our grandkids?

And then number three, people have a sense that Washington just doesn't work. And as a consequence, major challenges feel unaddressed, and major opportunities we don't seem to be able to seize. And that makes people cynical.

And so I want to—during the question and answers, I'm happy to talk about why I believe that not only is the economy doing well now, but the opportunities for us to create a strong middle class and ladders into the middle class are right there in front of us. I want to talk about how the strategies to rebuild an international order that doesn't just work for us, but for people around the world is right there in front of us.

I want to focus on this last thing, this third thing about—that Washington doesn't work. The tendency is to portray this as a problem with the system and a problem with both parties: Politicians are corrupt, and there's too much money, and the lobbyists have all this influence, and it doesn't really matter who's in charge. No matter what, Washington doesn't work.

And I'm here to assert—although I admit that this is probably preaching to the choir—that this is not a problem that both Democrats and Republicans suffer from. Democrats have their problems, Lord knows. Nancy, she deals with a caucus that occasionally is challenging. The Senate, by its nature, means that people have their quirky approaches to things. There are times where we're too dogmatic about certain things, not flexible enough; we're too captive to particular interests. It's politics. It's not perfect.

But the fact of the matter is, is that every time I came to Nancy Pelosi when she was

Speaker and there was a tough issue, and the question was, were we going to do the right thing even if it was politically unpopular, Nancy and the Democratic caucus in the House would step up and do it. And we had a whole bunch of people lose their seats because they thought it was the right thing to do.

The fact of the matter is, every time there has been the possibility of compromise on big issues like how we deal with our deficits and our debt, as unpalatable as it has sometimes been, we have been willing to put forward agendas that try to allow us to govern and meet Republicans more than half way.

This is not some equivalence between the parties. The reason Government does not work right now is because the other party has been captured by an ideological, rigid, uncompromising core that ignores science, is not particularly interested in facts, is not particularly interested in compromise, but is interested in having its own way 100 percent of the time. And that way, in large part, includes dismantling so much of what has created this incredible middle class and this incredible wealth here in America.

So, if you want to deal with the anxieties that Americans feel right now, there are going to be some things that are a little bit out of our control. We're not going to solve every problem in the Middle East right away, although we can make sure we're safe and that we're empowering better partners rather than the worst in the region. We're not going to solve every problem of the economy just in the next couple of years; there are still some long-term challenges and trends that we have to address.

But for the most part, we can build on the successes we've had over the last 6 years and make America do so much better than it's doing right now if we create a Congress that just even comes close to functioning. There will still be special interests. There will still be lobbyists.

There will still be contentious issues. Politicians will still be concerned about the next election. But every so often, we'll be able to govern and move forward on agendas like equal pay for equal work for women or minimum wage or rebuilding our infrastructure or all the issues in which a majority of Americans agree and, in some cases, a majority of Republicans agree.

So the answer to our challenges is actually pretty simple: We need a better Congress. And in order to do that—there are all kinds of formulas and polls and data and all, but actually, the answer to that is pretty simple too—people have to vote. People have to feel engaged. And the brilliance of the other side has been, over the last 4 years, they figured out, if we do nothing, if we oppose everything, then their poll numbers may be at 7 or 10 or whatever it is, but they will feed a cynicism about the possibilities of doing common work that leads people to just say, "I give up," and they turn away, and they don't vote. And the status quo remains.

So I'm encouraged by all of you here tonight because I think you understand how urgent it is for us to break that psychology. We've got to restore a sense in people that they have the power to move their Government forward. But in order to do that, we've got to make sure they vote. And in order to make sure they vote and that we've got the resources to make the case to the American people, the DCCC has got to be able to keep pace with all of the crazy money that's floating around there. You're helping us do that, and I'm very grateful for you.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:58 p.m. at the residence of Richard Bready and Betty Easton. In his remarks, he referred to June Langevin, mother of Rep. James R. Langevin; and Sabra Cicilline, mother of Rep. David N. Cicilline. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

## The President's Weekly Address

August 30, 2014

Hi, everybody. Whether you're firing up the grill, fired up for some college football, or fill-

ing up the car for one last summer road trip, happy Labor Day weekend.