

Remarks at a Democratic Hope Fund Reception in Los Angeles, California February 11, 2016

Thank you, guys! Thank you. It is so good to see all of you. It is good to be back in California. Before we came here, I went to my home State of Illinois. I love Illinois. It is, I believe, one of the greatest States in the country, but it's colder. [Laughter] It feels better here, right now, in February.

But let me begin by thanking Aaron and Danny and Gabriel for their hospitality. We are so appreciative of them. I want to thank our DNC vice chair, Lena Kennedy, our dear friend who brought her adorable grandchildren with her tonight. Although I think it's a school night, so we're going to have to get them home soon. Henry Muñoz, our DNC finance chair is here. Thank you, Henry.

And then we've got John Legend and his adorable wife Chrissy and soon-to-be baby. And I wanted to tell this story. All of you know how talented John is. All of you know how gorgeous Chrissy is. All of you know about the causes they care about. But some of you may not know that when I was running in 2007, 2008, and I had not yet won Iowa, and a lot of people still could not pronounce my name, at the Jefferson-Jackson dinner in Iowa, John Legend came to perform. And he has been one of my earliest supporters. He has worked with us on a whole range of issues, including most recently "My Brother's Keeper," which is designed to make sure that young people who are disadvantaged and potentially traveling down the wrong path are given a hand up. He's just a good man. And Chrissy is just a wonderful woman. And I am so grateful, and Michelle is grateful, that they're our friends. So we just wanted to give them a big shout-out. And I'm going to give him tips about raising girls. [Laughter] Because girls, they'll play you. [Laughter] They will. They will. Their daddies, they'll just be, like, pulling all those strings.

At my State of the Union Address, I mentioned this was going to be my last one and that I still have an enormous amount that I want to get done over the next 10 months—12 months, 11½ months. Somebody is keeping a daily cal-

endar. [Laughter] But I also wanted to remind people a little bit about the journey that we had traveled. Remind people that when we came into office, the economy was on the verge of collapse. Remind people that we were losing 800,000 jobs a month. Remind folks that we were still in the midst of two wars. Remind people that we were still the only advanced nation on Earth that did not provide affordable coverage to people who, in some cases, were losing their homes or going bankrupt because they got sick.

We still had "don't ask, don't tell" in place, which meant that people who were proudly serving and loving this country couldn't openly be with the persons that they loved. We had a lot of stuff to do. And I keep a little checklist in my desk of the commitments I made when I ran for office. And we haven't gotten 100 percent of what I wanted to get done, but we got about 80. And the unemployment rate went from 10 percent down to 4.9. And 18 million people have health insurance that didn't have it before. And we doubled clean energy and reduced our carbon footprint, and we are on the path to deal with climate change in a serious way for the next generation.

And we ended "don't ask, don't tell." It don't exist no more. We ended two wars. Brought the vast majority of our troops back home. We have expanded access to college for millions of young people who couldn't afford it. We have, on every single metric—whether you're talking about the auto industry, whether you're talking about our investments in basic science and research—we have made progress. The country is indisputably better off now than it was when I came into office.

Now, I say that not to boast, not to take a full accounting, because I've got a lot more I want to do, and history will tend to sorting out what happened. And I certainly don't say all those things to be complacent, because right now, as we speak, there are children in this city who have no place to sleep or don't have enough to eat. There are young people in this city and

around the country who are just as talented as me or John and yet are on their way to jail because they didn't see any options, any alternatives. As we speak, we still have brave men and women who are trying to help the Iraqis defeat ISIL, and we are still maintaining around the clock intelligence and military officers who are making sure that we prevent the kinds of tragedies that we saw in San Bernardino.

Climate change is still a problem. And we've got a long way to go, despite the Paris conference, in mobilizing the world to deal with it in a serious way so that our children and our grandchildren are not threatened by a warming planet. There are still millions of people who don't have health insurance because the other side decided to politicize this in a way that has prevented their own constituents from getting health care through the expansion of the Medicaid. We still got to fight for that.

Across the board, we've still got a lot of work to do. There are just a lot of ordinary, hard-working people who are still having trouble paying the bills at the end of the month or are worried about whether they can ever retire or save enough to help their kids go to school. There are still gay or lesbian youth who are being bullied and threatened and feel isolated and alone.

So our work is not done. But when we look at what we have accomplished over the 7 years, it should fortify us. It should make us feel as if change is possible. It doesn't mean it happens overnight. It doesn't mean that you always get 100 percent of what you want. This is a big, complicated, diverse country. And there are a whole bunch of people who genuinely disagree with me on a whole bunch of stuff, and they love the country just as much as I do. And the political process, the design of our government, is such that change a lot of times is slower than we want.

But we should take comfort in the fact that by doing the hard work of democracy, by engaging in the hard work of citizenship, we have moved the needle and people are better off than they were. And what that means is, is as we look to the future, we need to make sure that everybody here is feeling the same sense

of urgency and the same sense of excitement and the same sense of principle that you were able to muster when I first ran for office. As I look out this room, just like John, there are a lot of people who invested early in me. And I couldn't be more personally grateful for that. But remember, my slogan back then was not "yes, I can," it was "yes, we can." And I will not be on the ballot ever again, and I'm happy about that. [*Laughter*] Michelle is even happier. But as I said in a speech that I gave just this week—because I had gone back home to Springfield, Illinois, where I had first made my announcement back in 2007 in the State Capitol there, just across the street from where Lincoln had served as a State legislator—just as Brandeis once said, the most important office in a democracy is the office of citizen. The most important office in democracy is the office of citizen.

And so I won't be on the ballot, but I will still retain this office of citizen and will be right alongside you, working just as hard to make sure that the values we care about and the principles we believe in are vindicated. And I know that we live in a cynical time, and you're seeing in our election cycle right now the expressions of a lot of anger and frustration. Some of it is manufactured for political purposes. Some of it is hype that we see in the news cycle, in the media, in the age of Twitter. But the frustrations are there, and they're real.

And there are people who are afraid because they still remember what happened in 2007, 2008, and they saw their property values of their home plummet or their pensions suddenly vanish, or they lost their job and couldn't find another one. And so even if we've recovered, they still feel less secure than they did before that crisis. They watch the evening news and what's happening in Syria and other troubled parts of the world, and it comes home to them and they feel scared. And sometimes, fear, if unaddressed, if not channeled, can result in some pretty ugly politics.

And it has never been more important, then, for us as citizens to fight against that fear. It has never been more important, I believe, to embrace hope and find what we have in

common rather than what divides us than it is right now. And that means that we're going to have to work just as hard to elect a Senate that cares about equal pay and cares about raising the minimum wage and cares about nominating folks to the Supreme Court—or confirming folks to the Supreme Court that will preserve hard-fought gains when it comes to civil rights and equal rights. It means that we're going to have to have a Democrat in the White House after I'm gone to make sure that we continue the progress that we've made all these years.

And because of the forces of fear, it's going to be harder. We're going to have to push back against divisive politics. We're going to have to push back against misinformation. And that's going to require all of you to be engaged and involved and to pull more people in and to think in very hard-headed, but big-hearted ways about how do we make sure our government works for us and for people who are vulnerable and too often don't have a voice. Now, the good news is, I think we're going to succeed. Dr. King once said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." And I believe that; I've seen that in my own life.

We've got interns who rotate through the White House every 6 months, incredible young people. They're full of life, and they're engaged and excited and idealistic. And I usually meet with them at the end of the cycle, and they all raise their hands and want to ask questions. And invariably, there's a question to me about how can I make a difference. Some of them just go ahead and say, "How can I be President?" [Laughter] And I say to them, first of all, on the Presidency thing, worry more about what you want to do rather than what you want to be, because people I know who are successful don't start off saying, "I want to hold this office," or "I want to have that fame or fortune," but they're passionate about something, whether it's helping kids learn or making sure that folks who are sick have care or making sure that we have a great environment. And then, if you're passionate enough, and you follow that dream, who knows where that might

take you. So that's the little advice I give the young people about their career track.

But what I also say to them is, for all the challenges we face right now, if you had to choose one moment in world history in which to be born, and you didn't know ahead of time who you were going to be—whether you were going to be Black or White, gay or straight, American or Chinese or Cambodian—if you didn't know, you'd choose now. You'd choose now because, for all our challenges, the arc of the moral universe has bent towards justice. And America is a better place, for more people, than it was. That's not inevitable. It's not preordained. It is because there are people throughout our history who said, this is the right thing to do and I'm willing to work for it—and have been willing to work for it even if it takes a decade, even if it takes two decades, even if the fruits of their labors aren't realized until after they're long gone. That's why I ended up being the President of the United States. That's why so many of you have been successful. We stand on the shoulders of folks who labored.

So my main message tonight, to all of you—because you know the issues, you know what matters. This is a well-informed crowd. My main message to you has less to do with a particular policy position or why this election is important or what's at stake. It has more to do with a broader general sense of your obligations to continue to pull on that arc and bend it towards justice. You have to not only accept that responsibility, but you have to do so joyfully, because that's what makes America great. People who love this country can change it. We've proven that over the last seven years. We've proven that throughout history. Let's go prove it again.

Thank you, everybody. God bless you. Appreciate you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:29 p.m. at the residence of Danny Rose and Aaron D. Rosenberg. In his remarks, he referred to Gabriel F. Rose-Rosenberg, son of Mr. Rose and Mr. Rosenberg; and musician John Legend and his wife Chrissy Teigen. He also referred

to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secre-

tary on February 12. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks at a Democratic Hope Fund Dinner in Los Angeles February 11, 2016

Well, let me begin by thanking Sam and Leah. I've come to a lot of events in California, and all across the country, and I've decided I want to buy this house. [Laughter] Now, I don't have the mortgage yet, but—[laughter]. We are so grateful for your hospitality and your graciousness. And I want to thank everybody who is here. A lot of folks here have been supporters of mine since I was running for the U.S. Senate, not just the Presidency. And to be back with you again and to see how you've stuck with us through thick and thin is something that I'm extremely grateful for.

Because this is a smaller group, I want to spend most of my time in a discussion, take your questions, take your comments, take your advice. Everybody has got advice. [Laughter] So I'm not going to speak too long at the top, just to set the stage.

When I came into office, the country was in a bad way. We were losing 800,000 jobs a month. We were on the brink of a Great Depression. Millions of people didn't have health care, despite us being the wealthiest nation on Earth. We were in the midst of two wars. We were not in any serious way addressing climate change. Iran was on the brink of reaching breakout capacity for a nuclear weapon. Our standing around the world was diminished.

And because of your support and the hard work of a lot of people, not just in the administration, but outside of it, the country is indisputably better off now than it was. The economy has recovered. We've taken unemployment from 10 percent down to 4.9 percent. Eighteen million people have health care who didn't have it before. We put in place serious mechanisms to reduce our carbon pollution, and helped to mobilize an international response to climate change. We doubled the production of clean energy and creating good jobs here in America.

On social justice issues from ending “don't ask, don't tell” to helping to usher in an era in which no matter who you are, you can marry who you love, to dealing with our criminal justice system in a smarter way that keeps us safe, but also ensures that people who serve their time are able to reintegrate into society, we have moved the needle forward. And as Sam said, the question now is, how do we sustain that?

The most important thing we can do to sustain that progress is to make sure that we regain the Senate, we move towards regaining seats in the House, and we have a Democratic President. And this is a pretty sophisticated group, so I don't have to tell you what's at stake. Everything from Supreme Court appointments to our ability to sustain our leadership on climate change, to continue to make progress on closing the gap in opportunity for children all across this country—all those things are going to depend on what we do over the next several months.

This is a volatile time in politics because people are anxious. People are anxious from the experiences they had in 2007 and 2008. They're frustrated about long-term trends of inequality and the fact that wages and incomes haven't gone up as fast as, in many cases, corporate profits have. They're worried about disorder in the world and protecting America from groups like ISIL. And sometimes, when people are afraid, politics can take a bad turn.

And it's our job to make sure that we tap in to those best impulses of the American people, and we bring people together instead of dividing them, and we are tough and principled about the things that we believe in, but we also set a tone that ensures that this greatest democracy on Earth continues for our children and our grandchildren.