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Remarks at a Campaign Rally for Governor Jon S. Corzine in Hackensack, New Jersey

October 21, 2009

The President. Hello, New Jersey. It's good to be back in the Garden State.

Audience members. Obama! Obama! Obama! Obama! Obama!

The President. Thank you. Thank you. It's good to be here. I want to make some quick thank yous here. First of all, to the president of this outstanding university, Dr. Michael Adams; to my dear friend Caroline Kennedy; to our Lieutenant Governor candidate, State Senator Loretta Weinberg; my dear friend Frank Lautenberg, Senator from New Jersey; two outstanding Congressmen who supported me early in my race for the Presidency, Steve Rothman and John Adler, give them a big round of applause. One of the finest mayors not just in New Jersey, but in the country, Cory Booker is in the house. To all the other elected officials, to all the labor leaders and religious leaders that are in the house, and to all of you who are just—just leaders, period, I am so proud to be here on behalf of a man who is absolutely committed to fighting for New Jersey's families and New Jersey's future, your Governor, my friend, Jon Corzine.

Now, I think it's important for us to have an honest conversation here. Let's examine the facts. Let's examine the facts. Jon is running for reelection during a challenging time for New Jersey and for America. I don't have to tell you that. You've seen it in your own lives. You've seen it in your own communities. There are too many folks who are out of work and too many people who are looking for a job. There are too many hard-working families being squeezed by skyrocketing costs on the one side and shrinking wages on the other. You got men and women who've worked hard all their lives, who've done the right thing all their lives, and now they're worried they won't be able to be the kinds of husbands and wives, mothers and fathers they'd hoped to be because of economic factors beyond their control; seniors worried about whether they can stay on retirement; young people worried about whether they're going to be able to afford a college education.

So I know these are challenging times, and Jon knows these are challenging times. I know folks are hurting. But I also know this: For the past 4 years, you've had an honorable man at the helm of this State during one of the most difficult periods in its history. You've had a leader who's put the interests of hard-working New Jersey families ahead of the special interests. You've had a leader who's fought for what matters most to the people of New Jersey. That's the kind of Jon—the kind of Governor that Jon Corzine's been, that's the kind of Governor that Jon Corzine will continue to be, and that's why New Jersey needs to give Jon Corzine another 4 years.

Let's look at the record. Let's look at the record. Let's look at the record, because I know there's a tendency for politicians to distort their opponents' records in the heat of a campaign, so let's just review some history. This is a Governor who's provided more property tax relief than any Governor in New Jersey's history. This is the first Governor in 60 years who's reduced the size of government.

But at the same time, this is also a leader who's stood up against those who want to cut what matters, like education. Jon Corzine expanded early childhood education for more than

5,000 children because he understood that pre-K isn't babysitting, it's the cornerstone of a world-class education. Under Jon's leadership, the Children's Health Insurance Program expanded by nearly 100,000 kids in this State. Think about it: Kids who didn't have care now have it. New Jersey is now a leader in clean energy. And working families can spend time with a newborn baby or a sick loved one because of paid sick leave that has been signed into law by Jon Corzine. When it comes to the issues that matter most to folks, job creation and economic growth, Jon's been a true leader, the first Governor in this country to pass a recovery plan to get this economy moving in his State.

Now, listening to Jon's opponent, you'd think that New Jersey was the only State in America that's been swept up in the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, which by the way did not start under Jon Corzine's party's watch. There seems to be some selective memory here about how we got into this fix. Listening to his opponent, you'd think New Jersey was the only State in America that's been facing layoffs. You'd think New Jersey was the only State in America where hard-working men and women are worried about their families' futures.

Audience member. You tell them!

The President. I don't need to tell you, you know the truth.

It's not just Teaneck that's been going through tough times. It's not New Jersey that's been going through tough times. Americans in every corner of this country have been going through tough times. And let's be honest, this crisis came about because of the same sorts of lax regulation and trickle-down economic theories that the other guy's party has been peddling for years. I'm telling you, these folks, they got a lot of nerve. They leave this big mess, and suddenly, they're complaining about how fast we're cleaning it up.

And I'll tell you what we don't need to do right now. We don't need politicians who are more interested in scoring points than solving problems. We don't need politicians who are offering the same answers that got us into this mess in the first place. We don't need politicians who'd rather sit on the sidelines and point fingers than offer any answers, any real solutions.

We've had enough of those kinds of politicians in Trenton and in Washington. We don't need any more. What we need are leaders that are committed to moving this country forward, moving this State forward. That's the kind of leader Jon Corzine is. That's why he deserves another 4 years.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Four more years. Now, let me say something about Jon the man, because we served together in the United States Senate, and I learned what kind of man he is. I learned about his service as a United States Marine.

Audience member. Semper Fi!

The President. Semper Fi!

Gov. Corzine. Hooah!

The President. I learned about how he was born into a middle class family, how he worked his way up, how he's committed to giving every American the same opportunities he had. Jon Corzine was one of the best colleagues I had in the Senate, and he's one of the best partners I have in the White House.

Jon and I worked together to enact a Recovery Act that's making a meaningful difference for families in New Jersey and across America. I want you to understand this: Because of the Recovery Act, we've prevented the police officers and firefighters Americans rely on from being laid off across this State and across this country. We've put a middle class tax cut into the pockets of 95 percent of hard-working families; that includes 3 million hard-working New Jersey families. We increased and extended unemployment insurance for 12 million Americans to help them weather this economic storm, including 600,000 men and women in this State. We made COBRA 65 percent cheaper so if you've lost your job, you've still got your health care while you're looking for a new one. We invested more than $12,000 in scholarships for disadvantaged students right here—right here at this university—while keeping teachers in the classroom and improving schools all across this State.

And the Recovery Act didn't just include the most progressive tax cuts in American history. It didn't just include emergency relief for families that needed them or for States that were seeing their tax revenues dwindle. The Recovery Act was also the largest investment in education in American history. It was the largest investment in clean energy in American history. It was the largest investment in our Nation's infrastructure since Eisenhower built the Interway [Interstate][*] Highway System back in the 1950s, rebuilding our roads and our bridges and our crumbling infrastructure. That's what we've been fighting for, cleaning up the mess we found.

The reason I'm here today, the reason Jon Corzine is here today, the reason you are here today, is because you know our work is far from over. You know we still have big challenges ahead in New Jersey and across America. We are not going to rest until we solve them. We're not going to rest until anyone who's looking for a job can find a job and a job that pays a living wage. We're not going to rest until our markets are—not just our markets are rising again, but our businesses are hiring again. We're not going to rest until the American Dream is within reach of anybody who's willing to believe in it and work for it and fight for it.

And overcoming enormous challenges is not going to be easy. It's not going to happen overnight. But here's what I can say with absolute certainty. The difficult work of building a better future, it has begun. It's beginning right here in New Jersey. It's begun in Washington. It's begun across America. We've begun to build a clean energy economy that is going to free our Nation from the grips of foreign oil and generate green jobs in the process, putting people back to work in jobs that can't be outsourced. We've begun to put better standards into our schools, make college and advanced training more affordable, and prepare every child in America to succeed in the 21st century economy.

We've begun the work of reforming America's health care system. You know why it—why that's so important. Premiums have risen almost 90 percent here in New Jersey over the last decade, and that pace is only going to continue if we fail to act.

Audience member. We love you, Obama!

The President. We know—I love you back, but I'm making an important point right now. We know—so listen up—we know that millions of people in this country have been denied coverage because of a preexisting condition. We know that more and more companies are dropping coverage. We know more and more families are having to do without insurance, or they're struggling to pay out-of-pocket costs.

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[*] White House correction.

Now, Jon Corzine has begun to move New Jersey past this status quo, expanding coverage for nearly 150,000 people last year. And we're close to moving America past the status quo, closer to passing serious health insurance reform than at any time in our generation, giving coverage to people who don't have it, giving stability to people who do have it, controlling skyrocketing health care costs that are crushing our families and our businesses and our State and Federal budgets.

So that's what we're fighting for: quality, affordable insurance; a world-class education; a stronger economy that doesn't just work for some folks, but everybody. That's what matters to Jon Corzine. That's what he's fighting for as Governor. That's what he'll continue fighting for if the people of New Jersey give him that chance.

So let me just be clear. I know there are folks here who may be cynical about politics. Certainly, there are folks watching who might be cynical about politics. I know that folks are skeptical about whether their elected leaders can or will do anything about the problems they face. And you've got a right to be cynical. Year after year, decade after decade, you've seen progress stymied, partisan gridlock, whether it's in your State capitals or your Nation's Capital.

But here's the thing: New Jersey now has a Governor who is bucking that trend, who's refusing to go along with business as usual. He's telling the truth about the challenges you face, and he's making every effort to meet them. And I'm here today to urge you to cast aside the cynics and the skeptics and prove to all Americans that leaders who do what's right and who do what's hard will be rewarded and not rejected.

That's what so much of this campaign comes down to. It's a matter of trust. You know, I have traveled all across the country, and I've traveled all across New Jersey, and everywhere I go, people's expectations are pretty modest. They don't want government to solve all their problems. They know they've got to work hard. They've got to meet their responsibilities, their commitments. All they're looking for is a shot. They just want an opportunity. They just want to be able to find a job that pays a living wage. They want to be able to send their kids to college so they can have a better life than they did. They want to make sure they're not bankrupt when they get sick. They want to be able to retire with some dignity and some respect.

And the thing is, what they want from their political leaders, I think—this is I hope what you want—is not somebody who's slick, is not somebody who, you know, always look well-groomed. I mean, Jon's hair—[*laughter*]—kind of goes frizzy sometimes, and, you know, his beard gets a little, you know, straggly sometimes. It's not somebody who's going to pretend that everything is okay, is going to spend all his time blaming other people.

I hope what you want is somebody who's going to be straight with you, somebody who's got your interests at heart, and who's going to be out there every single day working for you because he cares about public service and he understands that if it hadn't been for some folks fighting for him, nobody—he would have never gotten to where he got to. Right?

So I want everybody who's watching to understand, Jon Corzine is a serious man, and he is serious about solving the problems of New Jersey. And we are coming down to the home stretch in this election. There's not a lot of time left. And in the days ahead, Jon is going to be talking to a lot of voters. He's going to be making a lot of speeches. He's going to be visiting a lot of towns and cities. But ultimately, the outcome of this race is not up to Jon, it's up to you. It's up to you. It's up to everybody who cares about this State, everybody who wants to build a better life for themselves and for their children.

And we are at one of those rare moments in history where we've been given the opportunity to change our country for the better. But it's never easy, and it never starts in Washington. It starts with you. When you elected me as President, just remember, nobody gave me a chance. We never promised it was going to be easy. But the excitement and the hope and the energy, that came out of your belief that that gap between what is and what's possible, that gap can be closed if everybody pulls together, if everybody's serious, if everybody is committed. We need that same kind of energy, excitement, commitment around this campaign.

And if you do that, if you do that, I guarantee you're going to have Jon Corzine as Governor. And so I'm going to close with a story that some of you may have heard. I'm going to close with a story that some of you may have heard, because I want you to go out there and start knocking on some doors and making some phone calls.

I heard somebody out here saying, "Fired up." I don't know if you guys remember where that story "fired up" comes from. Jon Corzine remembers. But I love this story, so I like telling it. It started very early in my campaign, when you guys couldn't pronounce my name. [*Laughter*] No, you couldn't. [*Laughter*] You said, "Who? He's running for what?"

So back early in that campaign, I went down to South Carolina, an early State. And I went to a legislative dinner; I had been invited to speak. It was very early, and I needed some endorsements, so I'm sitting next to this State legislator. And I said, "Ma'am, I'd like you to endorse my candidacy for President." She looked at me, she said, "Obama, I will give you my endorsement if you come to my hometown of Greenwood, South Carolina." And I must have had a glass of wine because right away I just said, "Okay, you got a deal." [*Laughter*]

Come to find out, Greenwood is an hour and a half from every place else. [*Laughter*] So about a month later, I come in, I arrive about midnight. I'm exhausted. I've been campaigning in Iowa, New Hampshire, nonstop, haven't seen my family, I'm feeling grumpy. I get to the hotel; I want to hit the bed.

Suddenly, I get a tap on the shoulder. It's my staff person saying, "Senator"—I was Senator back then—"Senator, we need you in the car at 6:30 tomorrow morning." I said, "What?" [*Laughter*] Six-thirty. I said, "Why?" Said, "Because you got to go to Greenwood like you promised."

So the next morning I wake up, and I feel terrible. I'm exhausted. And I go to the window, I open it up, it's pouring down rain outside. I go get some coffee, I open up the newspaper, there's a bad story about me in the New York Times. Jon, you know what that's like. [*Laughter*]

I go downstairs, my umbrella blows open, I get poured on. I'm soaked. So by the time we're driving, I'm soaked, I'm tired, I'm sleepy, I'm mad, and we're driving and driving, and it takes forever. Finally, we get to Greenwood, an hour and a half later, although you don't know you're in Greenwood right away because not a lot of buildings there. [*Laughter*] We pull alongside the little park, a little field house. We go inside. Lo and behold, there are only 20 people there—[*laughter*]—20 people.

So I'm a professional, I've got a job to do. I shake hands with everybody. "How do you do? What do you do? Nice to meet you." And suddenly, out of the blue I hear this person shout out, "Fired up?" And everybody in the room acts like this is normal. [*Laughter*] They say, "Fired up!" Then I hear, "Ready to go?" And everybody in the room suddenly says, "Ready to go!"

I don't know what's going on. I look back, there's a little lady, little woman. She can't be more than 5'2", 5'3", about middle-aged. She's dressed like she just came from church, got a big church hat. [*Laughter*] And she smiles at me, and she points at me, and she says, "Fired up?" [*Laughter*] Turns out, this woman is a city councilwoman from Greenwood who is famous for her chant. She also, by the way, I find out later, moonlights as a private detective. [*Laughter*] This is a true story.

But wherever she goes, she always likes to chant. And so for the next, it seemed like, 5 minutes, she would just say, "Fired up?" And everybody saying, "Fired up!" And, "Ready to go?" "Ready to go!" And I realized very quickly I'm being upstaged by this person. [*Laughter*] It's irritating me a little bit. [*Laughter*] I'm looking at my staff, they're shrugging their shoulders, they don't know.

But here's the thing, New Jersey, after about a minute, I suddenly start feeling like I'm fired up. I feel like I'm kind of ready to go. So I start joining in the chant. And for the rest of the day, whenever I'd see my staff, I'd say, "Are you fired up?" They'd say, "I'm fired up." "You ready to go?" "I'm ready to go, boss." And this becomes the mantra of our campaign, everywhere we go.

Audience member. Fired up!

The President. Fired up!

Here's the moral of the story. One voice can change a room. And if one voice can change a room, it can change a city. And if it can change a city, it can change a State. If it can change a State, it can change a nation. Change a nation, it can change the world. It can change in New Jersey, right here. Your voice can change this election. Don't give up. Don't lose heart. Don't get impatient. Support the guy who's fighting for you. Your voice can change the world. Your voice can elect Jon Corzine Governor once again of New Jersey. I need you. Jon needs you. Getting health care done depends on you. Getting energy done depends on you. Improving our schools depends on you.

So I've just got one question for you: Are you fired up?

Audience members. Fired up!

The President. Are you ready to go?

Audience members. Ready to go!

The President. Are you fired up?

Audience members. Fired up!

The President. Are you ready to go?

Audience members. Ready to go!

The President. Are you fired up?

Audience members. Fired up!

The President. Are you ready to go?

Audience members. Ready to go!

The President. Let's get Jon Corzine reelected. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:17 p.m. at Fairleigh Dickinson University. In his remarks, he referred to J. Michael Adams, president, Fairleigh Dickinson University; Caroline B. Kennedy, author and daughter of former President John F. Kennedy; Mayor Cory A. Booker of Newark, NJ; New Jersey gubernatorial candidate Christopher J. Christie; South Carolina State Rep. J. Anne Parks; and Edith Childs, city council member, Greenwood, SC.

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