

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

**Remarks at a Fundraiser for Senator Michael F. Bennet in Denver, Colorado
February 18, 2010**

The President. Hello, Denver! I'm fired up. What a great crowd.

Audience members. Yes we can! Yes we can!

The President. Yes we can.

Audience members. Yes we can! Yes we can! Yes we can! Yes we can! Yes we can!

The President. Thank you. Thank you, everybody. Listen, let me first of all say I am thrilled to be back in Denver. I've got some good friends here who I want to make sure I acknowledge, in addition to the guy standing beside me here.

First of all, your outstanding Governor is in the house, Bill Ritter. Where is Bill? There he is. Lieutenant Governor Barbara O'Brien is here. A great partner for this guy, Senator Mark Udall is in the house. Congressman Jared Polis is here. And an outstanding mayor, who I think actually might make a pretty good Governor, John Hickenlooper in the house.

It is great to be back in Colorado.

Audience member. We love you!

The President. I love you back. [*Laughter*] I know this State is the training ground for a few Winter Olympians who are doing us so proud. I know Shaun White's secret training facility up on Silverton Mountain paid off. I don't know how those guys do that, though. [*Laughter*] How do you start doing that? [*Laughter*]

Audience member. Practice!

The President. But how do you get up the guts the first time to start practicing doing that? [*Laughter*]

Gold medal for snowboarding—Colorado is the home of several Olympians, including Lindsey Vonn, who brought home the gold yesterday, Johnny Spillane, who won the silver medal in Nordic combined—the first American medal in that event. So I just want all of our Olympians to know that the United States of America is proud of you; we are cheering for you every day. I am checking my BlackBerry—[*laughter*]—every half hour to see how things turned out.

I've got some good memories of Denver, including one just down the road at Mile High Stadium. Some of you may have been there. You know, that night I talked about the promise of America. And I want you to know that not a single day goes by that I don't think about the obligation that I have to keep that promise alive for every single American and every single Coloradan.

Audience member. Thank you!

The President. You're welcome. [*Laughter*] Thank you for giving me the privilege of every single day thinking about how can we make that American Dream live for everybody, not just for some. And I'm thrilled to be here in support of a leader who shares our commitment to that priority, Senator Michael Bennet.

Now, some of you may support him just because he's got an adorable family. [*Laughter*] They are adorable. But for those of you who need additional reasons—[*laughter*]—let me testify about this guy. He's been an agent of change in these parts for a very long time. As a businessman, he turned struggling companies around and got them to work better. He knows how to make the private sector work. Then he put his talents to use making Denver work better. And Mayor Hickenlooper, one of America's finest mayors, soon to be one of America's best Governors, knows how valuable Michael can be.

Michael closed a budget deficit and balanced two budgets in a row by finding innovative ways to get the job of city government done. Then he took over the public school system, where progress was stalled and budgets were shrinking, and he turned that around too. He invested in your schools and your classrooms; he expanded early childhood education for your kids, finished with graduation rates up and student achievement climbing faster than in any other district in the State. In just a few short years, Michael proved himself to be one of America's great education reformers.

Audience member. That's right!

The President. That's right. [*Laughter*] I got an "Amen" over here. [*Laughter*]

So when I heard that he'd be joining your other extraordinary Senator, Mark Udall, I was thrilled because I knew that Michael is a different kind of leader, one who's unafraid to bring a fresh approach to tough challenges because he knows the old ways of doing business just won't do, not anymore. And Colorado, that is precisely the kind of leader that he has been in Washington. That's precisely the kind of leader he's going to continue to be when you reelect him as Senator from the great State of Colorado.

Now, keep in mind, Michael answered the call to service at an extraordinarily challenging time for Colorado and for America. He took office just over a year ago, 2 days after I did, and thinking about what we were facing then: a financial crisis unlike any that we had seen in generations; an economy that was bleeding 700,000 jobs a month; a \$1.3 trillion deficit; two wars; challenges that ranged from the specter of terrorism to the impacts of globalization; and on top of that, one of the toughest decades America's middle class has ever faced, with stagnant job growth and declining incomes and rising costs.

So when he was asked to serve, he could have said, "I don't think so." [*Laughter*] "I—you know, let me put this off for a while"—and especially when you think about the sacrifice he has to make with respect to a young family. Nobody would have blamed Michael if he had declined the challenge. He could have blinked in the face of these difficulties and shied away from an economy in turmoil. And he could have scanned the political landscape and seen the pain and anger that Americans were feeling and said, "You know what? Let me just point fingers at somebody else and wait till things got better."

But that's not what Michael did because that's not his style. He has always thrived in taking on the tough job. And he knew it would be a tough time to serve, but he knew that's when you can make the greatest difference. He knew that he might take a few licks as a politician, but he also knew it would be nothing compared to the licks that working families all across this State and all across this country have been taking every day. And so he stepped up. And he has been a tremendous ally for middle class families, not just here in this State but all across the country.

He was here by my side in Denver a year ago when we signed the Recovery Act into law. It wasn't a politically easy decision to make for any of us because we knew that we were already

facing big deficits that had been run up over the last decade. But we had a responsibility to do what was right for the American people and break the back of this recession that was slipping into a depression.

One year later, thanks largely to the Recovery Act, we can stand here again and say that a second depression is no longer a possibility. An economy that was shrinking by 6 percent a year ago is now growing by nearly 6 percent. According to independent, nonpartisan economists, there are about 2 million Americans who are at work today who would otherwise be unemployed.

We cut taxes for 95 percent of working families, for small businesses, for first-time homebuyers, for parents trying to care for their kids. For 8 million Americans paying for college, we made it less expensive. We extended and increased unemployment insurance for more than 19 million Americans. We made COBRA 65 percent cheaper for families who had suffered a job lost. We gave relief to States to help them through these tough times. And every Governor, Republican and Democrat, will acknowledge that if it hadn't been for that Recovery Act, we would have seen police officers and firefighters and teachers laid off.

And we began building the infrastructure, investing not just in roads and bridges, in airports and railways, but in the infrastructure of the future—something that John Hickenlooper knows a lot about—making sure that we've got high-speed rail in this country, making sure that we've got broadband lines in this country, making sure that we're investing in science and technology and education and clean energy in America that is going to assure long-term growth and prosperity.

Now, you wouldn't know any of this if you just listened to those who are trying to score political points by attacking me or attacking Michael or what we did, despite the fact that a lot of these guys, when it comes to the ribbon cuttings for the projects, they show up. [*Laughter*] They were holding up those big checks—[*laughter*]—"Look what I did for you." [*Laughter*] You know, I'm not going to give them hell. I'm going to tell the truth, and they'll think it's hell. That's what Harry Truman said.

But that's politics as usual. We've become accustomed to it. We've become numb to it. We're just accustomed to falsehoods and exaggerations and slash-and-burn politics.

But Michael and I, we don't have time for that nonsense. We're going to keep doing everything in our power to turn this economy around. We won't rest as long as millions are still without work or millions are still working harder and harder for less. Until they begin to feel recovery in their own lives, we're going to keep on working, because for years, Americans just doing their best to live up to their responsibilities have seen their leaders fail to live up to their responsibilities.

We've got a Washington where every day is election day. On Wall Street, they've seen failure rewarded. In the hallways of both cities, you see lobbyists and special interests using money and connections to stack the deck and pundits who all they're interested in is the political game—is the red team winning, is the blue team winning—instead of, are the American people winning.

And so people are fed up because it's not a game. It's not a game. And when I get out and I talk with workers in factories and families in diners, nobody is asking, who's up, who's down, what's the latest poll number look like? No one is asking me, hey, you know, who won the media cycle today? [*Laughter*] They're interested in how are we going to help them find a job when they've only known one trade in their whole life; how are they going to send their kids to

college; how are they going to pay the bills if they get sick; how are they going to retire when their savings are so beat up; and who, if anybody, is going to confront the real problems that touch their lives?

That's why I ran for President. That's why I was in Mile High Stadium. That's why Michael Bennet signed up to be your Senator. That's why we are not going to quit. We do not quit, because we believe if we're going to secure a better future for the people of this State and the American people, as Michael so eloquently spoke about, we're going to have to change the ways of Washington. We're going to have to solve problems that keep holding us back, and we've got no time to waste.

Now, look, this is a problem that transcends party, what's happening in Washington right now. A couple weeks ago, I went to the Capitol to speak with Democratic Senators. And Michael stood up—and he's new, so he's still kind of puzzled—[*laughter*]—as to why are—why is nothing getting done. [*Laughter*] So Michael stood up, he challenged everybody in the room, including me. He said, "This place looks broken to the American people. What can we do differently? What do we need to do differently, Democrats and Republicans, so that democracy can meet the test that we're facing right now?" That's what Michael asked me, and that's what the American people are asking.

Now, the first thing I'll say is, you've got to have more leaders like Michael Bennet, because he's determined to break through partisan gridlock to get the tough stuff done. He's fearless when it comes to challenging the old assumptions and the tired debates and the entrenched special interests that have stymied progress for too long.

He told me about a woman he met from Glenwood Springs. She asked him where could she get her lobbyist in Washington. [*Laughter*] Now, I don't know what he told her, but I—if she were here, I would tell her, you don't need a lobbyist because you've got Michael Bennet as Senator and you've got Mark Udall as Senator, and they are going to be looking out for your interests.

The only agenda Michael has is yours. He understands that there's something more important than pursuing power or clinging on to your seat or scoring points, and that's breaking free from the politics of the past and moving America forward at this defining moment in our history.

I mean, look, we can keep on being consumed by the politics of energy, but we know that there are factories to reopen and assembly lines to restart and workers ready to build wind turbines and solar panels and advanced batteries right here in the United States of America. We know that whoever leads the clean energy revolution is going to lead the 21st century economy. The people of Colorado understand that. Michael Bennet understands that.

And we can't wait. We can't wait, because China is not waiting, India is not waiting, Germany is not waiting. We can't afford to wait.

Audience member. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Exactly. [*Laughter*] We can't continue to spin our wheels in the old education debates. The stale debates, they pit teachers against reformers, meanwhile kids are trailing their counterparts all around the world.

So we need to do what Michael did here in Denver, which is to bring people together, get them talking, build consensus around reform. Because we know that the country that outeducates us today is going to outcompete us tomorrow, and we don't want that future for

our young people. We're not going to sentence them to a lifetime of lower wages and unfulfilled dreams.

We can continue to ignore the growing burden of runaway health care costs. And we all know what will happen if we do; it's already happening. Just the other week, one of California's largest insurers sent a letter to a million customers saying, your premiums are going to go up by as much as 39 percent.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. It's not just happening there. It's happening in Kansas. It's happening in Missouri. It's happening in Maine. You name it, across the country, it's happening; it's going to be happening here.

Audience member. It already is!

The President. Already happened. Now, after folks found out about this rate hike, they caused a ruckus, and the insurance company said, "Well, we'll put it off for couple months." I'm sure they're going to work on their PR a little more. [*Laughter*]

The reform before Congress that people like Michael and myself have been working on would help prevent such hikes from happening. And if we walk away from it, we know that premiums and out-of-pocket expenses will keep rising this decade, just as they did in the last decade. More small businesses are going to be priced out of the insurance market. More business—more big businesses are going to be unable to compete internationally. More of you will see health care taking a bigger and bigger bite out of your paychecks. Millions will lose their coverage. Our deficits will keep on growing because health care costs, by far, is the biggest driver of deficits.

And that's why we're not going to walk away from it. That's why I've asked leaders of both parties to come meet with me next week. I want to see what their ideas are, because we know we've got ideas that will work for America, and we can't afford to wait.

We can keep on playing games with the deficit. But Michael Bennet refuses to. He was a strong supporter of the PAYGO law that says, surprisingly enough, to Congress, you have to pay as you go, a novel concept—[*laughter*—that helped produce the budget surpluses of the 1990s. If you want to spend on something new, you've got to cut back somewhere else. Michael was part of a majority in the Senate that supported the creation of an independent, bipartisan fiscal commission to help us find long-term solutions to some of the problems that we're facing.

Audience member. Medicare for all!

The President. There you go.

Now, unfortunately, partisanship blocked that step. Some of you read about this, how there were seven people who were cosponsors of this bill that would create this fiscal commission who, when I decided I was for it, suddenly were against it. [*Laughter*] They were sponsors of the bill. So we said, okay, that's all right, I'll establish one on my own—National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility. We signed it today—Alan Simpson, a Republican; Erskine Bowles, a Democrat—to find real solutions.

Michael held an event out here recently where he was talking about fiscal discipline, and his 10-year-old daughter Caroline came to watch. There she is; wave. Yes, there she is. [*Laughter*] When she was born, America had a surplus. But after two tax cuts, two wars, a prescription drug program, none of which were paid for, we faced a deficit of over \$1 trillion

and projected deficits of \$8 trillion over the next decade. That's all before my administration spent a single dollar. Then you had the recession. That's another \$3 billion. And then we did have to make sure that we were stimulating the economy, and that cost about a trillion [dollars],* a fraction of the overall debt.

So that's what we inherited. And as Michael and his daughter walked out of the event—she was listening to all this—I don't know if you were adding all this up in your head, Caroline, but she said, "Dad, just so you know, I'm not paying for all that." [Laughter] I—that's a smart kid. [Laughter]

Her message was crystal clear. The American people did not send us to Washington to argue; they didn't send us to Washington to obstruct; they sent us there to do what it takes not to win the next election but to help the next generation. You sent us there to work together, to do what's right, to solve our problems once and for all.

Now, you've got a Senator right now who goes to work every single day with that mission in mind. And even though Michael Bennet has been serving you for years, believe it or not, this is his first election. He's a heck of a public servant, but he's new to politics, so he hasn't learned the best way to keep your poll numbers up is just to smile and wave and pretend like you're doing something and not really doing anything that might offend anybody. He hasn't perfected the 7-second sound bite. He's never even made a TV ad. Heaven forbid. [Laughter] And he's facing reelection in a tough political climate.

Look, something you got to understand: For those who don't believe in government, those who don't believe that we have obligations to each other, it's a lot easier task. If you can gum up the works, if you make things broken, if the Senate doesn't get anything done, well, that's consistent with their philosophy. It's a whole lot easier to say no to everything. It's a whole lot easier to blame somebody else. That politics that feeds on peoples' insecurities, especially during tough political times, that's the easiest kind of politics. There's a long, storied history of that kind of politics.

And so Michael is running in a very tough environment, but he's got one very powerful advantage: He's got you. He's been fighting for each and every one of you in Washington. He needs you to fight for him now. And if you do that, if you're willing to organize and make phone calls and talk to your friends and your neighbors and explain to them what's at stake, if you come out and caucus for Michael on March 16th and then fight for him all the way to November, if you help him finish what we've started, we're not just going to move Colorado forward, we're going to move America forward, and we're going to guarantee that this century is the American century just like the last one is.

Let's get to work, Colorado. God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:50 p.m. in the Fillmore Auditorium. In his remarks, he referred to Shaun White, snowboarder, and Lindsey Vonn and Johnny Spillane, skiers, 2010 U.S. Olympic team; and former Senator Alan K. Simpson and former White House Chief of Staff Erskine B. Bowles, Cochairs, National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform.

* White House correction.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Senator Michael F. Bennet, fundraiser in Denver, CO.

Locations: Denver, CO.

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