

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

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

The President. Hello, Denver. Well, it is good to be back in Denver, good to be in Colorado, and good to be campaigning for one of the finest young Senators we have in the United States Senate, Michael Bennet.

I have to confess the reason I was delayed. I was grabbing one of those little canapes. [Laughter] Quite tasty.

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. You had one too.

Audience member. Thanks for the snow.

The President. You're welcome. Well, look, it is wonderful to be here. We just came from the Fillmore Auditorium, where we had—what did we have, a couple thousand people?

Senator Bennet. We had more, twenty-four hundred.

The President. Twenty-four hundred people, not that he's counting. Because they understand that at this defining moment in our history, we've got to have people who are willing to fight on behalf of families all across America. And they know that Michael got into this business because he believes in that fight.

Now, before I go on, I think there are a couple people who are still around. I'm not sure if they're out here. But the senior Senator from Colorado, Brother Udall, is right here. Give him a big round of applause. And a great friend and a terrific Governor of California is here. Where's Governor Ritter? Where did he go?

Audience members. Colorado.

The President. Colorado, sorry; what did I say? [Laughter] California. Listen, East Coast time, it's past my dinner. That's why I made—give Bill Ritter a big round of applause.

All right, now, back to what I was saying. [Laughter] You know, obviously, we know that the country is going through a tough time. But when I was here a year ago at Mile High, and some of you were probably here—some of you were there with me—I made a promise to you, not that I was going to tell you what you wanted to hear, not that I was always going to do what was popular. What—I promised you that I would wake up each and every day thinking about how we can make sure that the American Dream is working for everybody, and more importantly, how we can make sure that it's working for the next generation.

And one of the things throughout my campaign for the Presidency was reminding America that this isn't about a candidate, this is about the people. That change comes from the bottom up, not from the top down; and that the kind of transformation that we needed was not going to happen because you elected me as President, because—but rather because all of us together were willing to join and all of us were willing to take responsibility.

Now, one of the things—the great things that you did was to send two outstanding United States Senators with me on this difficult journey. And we've got to make sure that Michael continues on that journey with me. Because the same things that we fought for in 2008, the

same things that I campaigned on, that same spirit, that's what's driven Michael all his life. He knows what it's like to come from humble beginnings. He knows what it's like to make sure that everybody is going to have a chance in life.

And that's why, even though he was successful in business and the private sector, he decided that he could make his biggest contribution by going into public service, and I'm sure taking a really big pay cut. *[Laughter]*

So working with the outstanding mayor and soon-to-be Governor, John Hickenlooper, he helped to balance budgets, he helped to make sure that this city was running as well as it's ever run, a model for cities across the Nation. And then he decided, well, that's not a big enough challenge; let me try to fix the school system. And he took that on. And he did it with the same energy and the same determination and the same capacity to bring discordant voices together and get them to work and think in new ways. And as a consequence, you saw the performance of this school district go up as fast as any school district anywhere in the country.

So he's been a business executive, he's somebody who's run a school system and made it work for children, and then he decided, well, let me try this U.S. Senate thing.

Now, I'm not sure he knew entirely what he was bargaining for. Udall might have warned him a little bit, because Udall had been in Congress for a while. But the truth is, Michael is a pretty bright guy, and he understood this was not going to be an easy year or two to get started in electoral politics.

I mean, think about where we were last year. Michael took his spot about 2 days after I was inaugurated, and at that point, we already understood that we had the worst recession since the Great Depression; we're losing 800,000 jobs per month. We knew that the financial system was on the verge of meltdown. We knew that we were involved in two wars, that we were inheriting a \$1.3 trillion deficit. We knew that this was going to be a tough time.

So nobody would have blamed Michael if he had said, "You know, maybe I'll make my maiden race 4 years from now, when things are looking a little bit better." But that's not what he did. He stepped up. And not only did he step up, but since he has been in Washington, there has not been a better champion on behalf of middle class folks and on behalf of the dreams and aspirations that each of you carry for your children and your grandchildren than Michael Bennet. There has not been anybody who's been fighting harder for you and taking the tough votes.

He was with me when we signed the Recovery Act that has provided a tax cut for 95 percent of working families, created an entire new sector of clean energy. Did you know that when we started last year—the Recovery Act—we had about 2 percent of the advanced battery production here in the United States, almost all of it was coming from Asia. We now have 20 percent capacity, and we're going to go up to 40 percent capacity. That's because of the kind of work that Michael Bennet, working with his partner, Senator Udall, did.

We provided the biggest boost in education from the Federal Government in our history, and not just any kind of money, but rewarding success, rewarding reform, investing in research and development and math and science education, because we understand that whatever country out-educates us today is going to out-compete us tomorrow, and we will not tolerate America being number two or number three in the number of scientists and mathematicians.

We made investments not just in roads and bridges, as important those are, but we made investments in smart grid and high-speed rail and broadband, the infrastructure of the 21st

century that's going to make sure that we can compete. All these things were because Michael pushed and Michael supported an agenda that was not only going to deal with the immediate crisis, but, looking beyond, trying to figure out what our future was going to be.

And that's just one of the fights he's fought. Alongside me and the rest of the Democrats in the Senate, we've been able to make sure that credit cards were no longer the source of abuse for ordinary consumers. We passed housing fraud legislation to make sure that people weren't taken advantage with predatory loans. We passed the largest expansion of national service that our young people can get involved at an early age in giving back to America. We provided children—4 million children in this country, without passing health care—comprehensive health care yet—we've already provided 4 million children with health care that didn't have it before Michael joined the United States Senate.

So this guy's been fighting for you. Now you need to fight for him. Because the fact of the matter is, is that this is a tough political environment. I'm not telling anything—anybody anything they don't know. As successful as the Recovery Act and our other steps have been in breaking the back of the recession, there are still millions of people out there who are struggling, who are trying to figure out how to pay the mortgage. They're seeing their homes underwater. They're worried about whether they can find a job if they've already lost the one that they had.

And so understandably, people are scared. And sometimes when people are scared, politics can get rough. That's not unique to this period of time; that's been true throughout our history. And it doesn't help when you've got an opposition that is more interested in tearing the other party down than they are in building America up.

But what Michael understands is that as many barriers as there may be in front of us, we've got to keep on going, because just walking away is not an option. Look, he hasn't been in politics long enough to understand that the easiest way to get reelected is just to wave and smile and don't say anything offensive. *[Laughter]* Keep your head down, don't do anything, that's the best way to keep your poll numbers high.

But he understands that we can't afford that. We can't afford to walk away from a clean energy future. We can't afford to walk away from making sure that our education system is producing the kinds of scientists and engineers and entrepreneurs that are going to build our economy in the future. We can't afford to walk away from a health care system that is broken for everybody—for small businesses and large businesses, for families who are seeing their premiums go up 25 percent, 30 percent, 35 percent, for the millions who don't have health insurance at all, and for future generations who are going to have to carry the bill if we don't get control of health care costs like Medicare and Medicaid. He understands we cannot walk away from it and we will not walk away from it. If I've got Michael Bennet's help, we are going to get health care reform passed in this country.

So, yes, it's tough. *[Laughter]* But we're tougher. We've been through tougher times. Our parents, our grandparents, many of you in your own lives, you know what it's like when you hit a barrier. There are times where you feel doubtful. There are times where you get weary. But what has defined America throughout our history is that in fits and starts, we just keep on going forward. And we're driven not just by self-interest; we're driven not just by greed or not just by inquisitiveness. We're driven by a sense of responsibility and obligation to others, to this country, to our community, to our children, to the next generation.

That's what drove Michael into public service. That's what is keeping him going, even when he's away from that gorgeous family of his. And that's why he needs you.

Look, there will continue to be special interests and lobbyists and those in Washington who are going to try to go after a guy like this who plays it straight. They're going to try to take him out. They've got all their pollsters and their—and we got to—this is a rookie here. The guy has never cut a TV ad. [Laughter] He doesn't know how to speak in 7-minute—7-second sound bites. [Laughter]

So they've got a target on him. And this becomes a test of what kind of government do we want. Do we want the kind of government where an outstanding individual who's in it for all the right reasons and has a track record of success in making systems work for ordinary people—are we going to make sure that this guy has a long and outstanding career in Washington? And are we going to channel that anger and that frustration we feel sometimes, understanding that Michael is not part of the problem, he's part of the solution, and that he's somebody who is going to change Washington if you send him back there and give him the kind of mandate that he deserves?

So my bottom line is this: As hard as you worked in 2008, you've got to work harder in 2010. If you raised money for me, I want you to raise more money for Michael Bennet. If you made more—if you made phone calls for me, I want you to make more phones calls, and I want you to Twitter, too, for Michael Bennet. If you knocked on doors on your block, I want you to go in your whole neighborhood for Michael Bennet.

I want you to work hard, because if you do, then I am absolutely confident that not only is Michael Bennet going to continue to be the United States Senator from Colorado, I am confident that this is going to be one of the most outstanding Senators that we've ever had and a great leader for all of America.

Thank you very much, Denver. Let's get to work. Let's get busy. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:04 p.m. at the Sheraton Denver Downtown Hotel. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 19.

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and Human Services, Department of : State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP); ;
Housing : Fraud Enforcement and Recovery Act of 2009 ; ; Housing : Housing market,
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