

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks at a Fundraiser for Senatorial Candidate Robin Carnahan in Kansas City, Missouri

July 8, 2010

The President. Thank you so much. Thank you. Everybody, have a seat. Everybody, have a seat. Everybody enjoy themselves. The—how's lunch?

Audience members. It's good.

The President. All right, good.

Hello, Kansas City. It is good to be back in the Midwest, even better to be back in the Midwest with Robin Carnahan.

I—you all have had a long tradition of sending tough, independent, no-nonsense leaders to Washington, from Harry Truman to my great friend Claire McCaskill to some wonderful Missourians who go by the name of Carnahan.

Nobody fits this mold better than Robin. She's not going to Washington to represent the oil industry or the insurance industry or the banks on Wall Street. She's not even going there to represent every aspect of either party's agenda or my agenda. She's going to Washington to represent one constituency, and that's you, the people of Missouri. She's going to call them like she sees them, and she sees them the same way that most of you do, the same way that most of the people of Missouri do.

Robin's a small-business owner, still runs her family farm. That's why as your secretary of state, she cut redtape for small businesses and saved small-business owners millions of dollars so they can focus on growing their companies and creating jobs right here in this State. That's why she spent her time in office standing up for consumers, got \$10 billion back for Missourians who were being taken advantage of by big institutions. That's worth applauding—\$10 billion is real money. That's why she worked with Democrats and Republicans to pass one of the strictest laws in the Nation protecting seniors from fraud. That's why Missouri needs somebody like Robin Carnahan in Washington, DC. She is a fighter, she is a survivor, and she will never forget where she comes from or who she represents. And that's why I'm glad to see that all of you are here today, because you know that about Robin.

Now, we need tough leaders like Robin in Washington because these are tough times for America; I don't need to tell you that. Eighteen months ago, I took office after almost a decade of economic policies that gave us sluggish growth and falling or flat incomes and record deficits. They were the policies that culminated in an economic crisis that was the worst since the Great Depression. Three million Americans lost their jobs in the last 6 months of 2008. The month I was sworn in, in January of 2009, more than 750,000 jobs were lost in that month alone. These aren't just numbers. Most of you in this room were either touched by this or know somebody who was.

And the policies that led to this economic disaster were pretty straightforward: You cut taxes for millionaires and billionaires who don't need the tax cuts, didn't even ask for them, you cut rules and regulations for the most powerful institutions, whether it's big banks on Wall Street or big oil companies in the Gulf, and you cut working people loose to fend for

themselves. You tell them, you're on your own. You put a fancy name on it. You call it the "ownership society" or whatever the new slogan is. But it's the same policy over and over again.

And I think everybody here would agree, those policies were bad for the people of Missouri. They were bad for workers. They were bad for responsible business owners. They were bad for America. And that's why we took a different path when I got elected—so we could stop the freefall and rebuild our economy for the long run.

And our ideas have been pretty straightforward. We cut taxes—didn't raise them, we cut them—for 95 percent of working families and small-business owners, the people who needed it most and were most impacted by the recession. We're making sure that everybody—the Wall Street banks, other big corporations—are playing by the same rules as small-business owners and everybody else in America. We can't have two sets of rules. And we're investing in our people, investing in them and their future, in the skills and education of our workforce, in the research and clean energy technologies that will create thousands of new jobs and new industries and make our country competitive in the 21st century. That's our vision for America.

Now, we knew from the very beginning that some of the steps that we had to take would be difficult and unpopular. I love sometimes—the pundits will say, "Boy, Obama's doing this stuff; it's not very popular." I've got pollsters too. *[Laughter]* I know—*[applause]*—before we make decisions, we know initially how they're going to play. But our decision was not to worry about the next election. We decided to worry about the next generation.

We knew it took years to dig the hole that we were in and it would take some time to dig out, longer than anybody would like. But here's what I also knew: An economy that was shrinking, if we did what we needed to do, would be growing. And it has now been growing for the better part of a year. An economy that was once losing jobs has now been adding private sector jobs for 6 consecutive months. During that time we have created nearly 600,000 jobs in the private sector—not public sector jobs, private sector jobs—600,000.

Now, that's not enough. Not when there's still five folks out of work for every available job. Not when there are still storefronts on Main Streets all across the country that are sitting there empty. It's frustrating, and it's heartbreaking. And we've got plenty more work to do. But here's what you need to know: We are headed in the right direction, and the last thing we should do is go back to the very ideas that got us into this mess in the first place.

That's the choice that you're going to be facing in November. It's a choice between the policies that led us into this mess and the policies that are leading us out of this mess. It's a choice between falling backwards or moving forward. Robin wants to move us forward. I want to move us forward. And I believe that you and the rest of America are ready to move forward, and that's why you're going to send Robin Carnahan to Washington, DC.

Some of the same folks in the other party whose policies gave us the economic crisis are now looking for another chance to lead. They spent nearly a decade driving the economy into the ditch, and now they're asking for the car keys back. *[Laughter]* They can't have them back. They don't know how to drive. Don't know how to drive, drive in the wrong direction, get us stuck. And by the way, Robin's opponent hasn't just been along for the ride. As one of the Republican leaders in the House of Representatives, he had his hands on the wheel. He was there giving those tax breaks to millionaires and billionaires and oil companies without paying for them, adding to our deficit, adding to our debt. He fought for fewer rules and less oversight for Wall Street—still fighting for them. That's how he makes his money.

So we already know how this story ends. We don't have to guess how the other party will govern because we're still living with the results from the last time they governed. And in the 18 months since I've been President, they have been singing from the same hymnal.

Right after I took office, we passed an economic plan that cut taxes for over 2 million Missouri families, a plan that provided more than 1,500 loans to Missouri small businesses, a plan that has extended unemployment benefits to 170,000 Missourians who lost their jobs through no fault of their own. Fifty-five thousand men and women in this State are working today because of this plan. I just met 50 of them at the Smith Electric Vehicles plant in Kansas City that I visited right before I came here.

So our plan was to provide grants to companies like Smith Electric Vehicles all across America, businesses that are investing in clean energy manufacturing and technology. Smith Electric is making the world's largest battery-electric-powered trucks. But there are also companies like Siemens Wind Power in Iowa that are making these wind turbines, delivering energy—clean energy—all across America, or Celgard in North Carolina, which is a battery technology company, or a biofuel refinery plant called POET right here in Missouri. That's how we create jobs and economic growth. That's how we ensure that America leads in the industries of the future.

I'll give you an example. Just a few years ago, America had the capacity to build only 2 percent of the world's advanced batteries for electric and hybrid cars and trucks. Today, thanks to our policies, thanks to a new focus on clean energy and the work taking place at plants like Smith Electric, in 5 years, we could have as much as 40 percent of the world's capacity to build these batteries—40 percent. That means jobs right here in Missouri. It also means we're developing the expertise in a sector that is going to keep building and growing and innovating far into the future.

That's what our economic plan is doing. Robin Carnahan supports that plan. Her opponent doesn't. Like almost every member of the other party in Congress, he said no. If he had his way, there would be a lot of Missouri families and small businesses paying higher taxes today. There would be a lot of small-business owners who wouldn't have received the loans they needed to keep their doors open and make payroll. Those jobs at Smith Electric, those clean energy jobs and businesses that our policies are supporting across America, a lot of them wouldn't be here today.

These folks in the other party in Washington want to take us backwards. But Robin and I and Claire McCaskill, Jay Nixon—we want to take America forward. And that's the choice in this election.

You'd think that after this devastating financial crisis, we'd all agree that we believe in the free market system, we want a dynamic financial sector, but it makes sense to have a little better oversight on Wall Street to prevent something like this from happening again. Right? That would be the sensible thing to do. You'd think that would be a nonpartisan issue. When we lost trillions of dollars of wealth, people's 401(k)s plunged, stock market plunged, the entire economy went into a tailspin—maybe we just want to make sure that doesn't happen again. That'd be the sensible approach.

Robin's opponent and almost all of our friends in the other party are against Wall Street reform. The Republican leader, Mr. Boehner, said this reform was like employing nuclear weapons to kill "an ant," he said. An ant—that's what he called what we just went through. You can imagine a movie: "The Ant That Ate Our Economy." It's just—[laughter]—that's a big ant.

So they continue to defend the status quo that got us into this mess, a system that allowed reckless speculators to gamble and left the rest of America to pay for their mistakes. That doesn't make sense to you; it doesn't make sense to me. It's not good for our country.

In the end, it's not good for all the hard-working, honest people in the financial industry who were put at a competitive disadvantage because of the recklessness of a few.

So let me tell you, when the Senate returns, we're going to pass reform that ends this era of irresponsibility, reform that protects consumers against unfair practices of credit card companies and mortgage lenders, reform that makes sure taxpayers are never again on the hook for Wall Street's mistakes.

It'd be a lot easier to get it passed—it would already have been done—if I had Robin Carnahan there. She doesn't want to move us backwards. She wants to move us forward, and that's the choice in this election. I need another vote. It'd be helpful. *[Laughter]*

Despite the growing burdens on middle class families struggling to send their kids to college, Robin's opponent and almost all of our friends in the other party voted against a law that provides billions of dollars that were going to financial institutions, senseless subsidies, and now will be going to young people for scholarships—billions of dollars for student loans paid for because we're eliminating subsidies that shouldn't have been there in the first place. Nearly a million more students from working families will have access to financial aid, access to college, because of what we did. The other side said no.

They said no to laws that we passed to stop insurance companies from denying coverage to people with preexisting conditions. They said no to requiring women to get equal pay for equal work. They said no to extended unemployment insurance for folks who desperately needed help. They said no to holding oil companies accountable when they bring on catastrophe.

You may have read the top Republican on the House Energy Committee, Mr. Barton, publicly apologizing to BP after we compelled them to set aside \$20 billion to pay for the folks who have suffered as a consequence of the oil spill. Does anybody here think BP should get an apology?

Audience members. No!

The President. Mr. Barton did. He called this "a tragedy," this fund that we had set up to compensate fishermen and small-business owners throughout the Gulf. That's not the tragedy; the tragedy is if they didn't get compensated.

So this is the leadership that we've gotten from Barton and Boehner and Blunt. Sometimes I wonder if that "no" button is just stuck—*[laughter]*—in Congress, so they just—they can't do what's right for the American people.

And this isn't just about politics. But a awful lot of it has to do with politics, because I think they figure if they just keep on saying no to everything and nothing gets done, they're going to get more votes in November. The theory is, if I lose, then they win. But that's the old brand of politics. That just takes us backwards. Robin wants to move America forward. We want America to win, not just Democrats to win. That's the choice in this election. Are we all going to pull in a single direction to get this country moving?

Last point I'm going to make: Lot of our friends in the other party like to talk a big game about fiscal responsibility and out-of-control spending. Now, I'll be honest with you, it's one of the things that keeps me up at night, thinking about all the debt and deficits that we inherited

that have accumulated. Often I hear Claire McCaskill's voice in my head reminding me of that. [Laughter] Maybe it's just my voicemail. [Laughter] Robin feels the same way. She's a small-business owner. She knows about making sure that she stays on budget, that she's not spending more than she takes in. And families around the country have been tightening their belts for a few years now. So, rightly, they think it's time that their Government did the same thing.

So that's why we proposed a 3-year freeze on all Government spending outside of national security, something that was never enacted in the previous administration. That's why we've gone through the budget line by line, identified more than 120 programs for elimination. That's why we put forward a fiscal commission that's bringing both parties together to come up with a long-term solution for our deficit. And working with leaders like Claire and Robin, we're going to keep on taking the steps we need to in the months and years ahead, steps that don't just make Government leaner but also smarter and more efficient and more accountable. That's what Harry Truman did when he fought to hold war profiteers accountable. That's what Claire and I are fighting for today.

So I got to say, when I hear the other party talking about fiscal responsibility, criticizing us for fiscal responsibility when I had a \$1.3 trillion deficit wrapped in a big bow waiting for me when I got to the White House—[laughter]—I've got to scratch my head a little. You'd think that after turning a record Clinton surplus into a record deficit and record debt, they'd be a little shy about this. [Laughter] On their watch, they neglected to pay for two wars, neglected to pay for two tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans, didn't control spending, set up a worthy but expensive prescription drug program—didn't pay for any of it. So it's a little odd getting lectures on sobriety from folks who spent like drunken sailors for the better part of the last decade. [Laughter] They want to take us backwards. Robin and I and Claire, we want to take America forward. That's the choice in this election.

So here's the bottom line: These are incredibly challenging times, there's no doubt about it. And as I said every day during the campaign, change is hard. Change takes time. The problems we face have been building up for decades; they're not going to go away overnight. Not in 1 year, not in 4 years. No President, no politician has the power to snap their fingers and fix everything. A lot of folks will tell you that the closer you get to election day, that they can, but you can't believe them.

Here's what we can do, though. We can make choices about which direction we want to take this country. We can stop putting off the things that have been holding us back and going ahead and tackling them and fixing them. We can do what we've always done, whether it was on a farm or dealing with a crisis overseas: We shape our own destiny as a nation. We decide what we're going to bequeath to our children and our grandchildren.

The interests of the status quo, they'll always have the most influential and vocal defenders. There will always be lobbyists for the powerful industries that don't want more regulation or would rather see tax breaks instead of more investments in education and infrastructure. And let's face it: The prospect of change is scary, even when we know the status quo isn't working.

But there are no powerful interests to lobby for the clean energy company that may start for a few—hiring folks a few years from now or the research that may lead to a lifesaving medical breakthrough or the student who may not be able to afford a college education, but if they got that education, their dreams would not just carry them, but carry other people with them.

It's our job as a nation to advocate on behalf of the America that we hope for, even when it's not popular, even if we can't always see benefits in the short term, because we know it will pay off in the long term. It's our job to fight not just for the next election but for the next generation, for our children and our children's children.

And that's what I've tried to do every day as President. That's what Robin Carnahan will do when she is the next great Senator from the State of Missouri. I need all of you to join us on this journey. And if you're willing to make that investment, I guarantee you our better days are not behind us, they are in front of us.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:36 p.m. at the Kansas City Marriott Downtown. In his remarks, he referred to former Sen. Jean Carnahan; Rep. Russ Carnahan; Missouri senatorial candidate Rep. Roy Blunt; and Gov. Jeremiah W. "Jay" Nixon of Missouri.

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