

*Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010*

## **Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner**

*September 30, 2010*

Thank you. Thank you, everybody. It is great to see all of you. I am not going to give a long speech because I'm going to have a chance to sit at each table and talk to you in a smaller, more intimate setting. But I just want to, first of all, say thank you to John and Linda. I want to thank them, first of all, because they've taken some time off from the resort operation that they're running. *[Laughter]*

Those of you who may be aware that they have this spectacular situation in Italy, every one of my staff have rotated through there except me. *[Laughter]* And I don't know what it takes for me to get an invitation, but I'd appreciate a little break and some Tuscan sun and wine and—*[laughter]*—you know, pasta. *[Laughter]* I could use it. So it's not going to come immediately, but I'm holding out hope.

I am also thankful that John is still talking to me because for about a year and a half he never saw his wife. And Linda just was unbelievable for us, first during the campaign, helping us to navigate through a, at times, challenging press situation, with her extraordinary experience, and then helping to guide us through all the choppy waters that were required to get health care reform passed. So these guys have just been great friends for a very, very long time, as have many people in this room.

I'm just coming off 3 days on the road, and I want to report what's going on outside of Washington, because I think it's a useful corrective to what you may be reading and hearing on a day-to-day basis.

As John indicated, we're going through a very tough time. This is the toughest economy that most of us have experienced in our lifetimes; the toughest economy since World War II, since the Great Depression. And so people are feeling it. There are millions of people who are still out of work and are looking for work every day. There are hundreds of thousands of people who've lost their homes. There are millions of people who've seen their home values decline, their 401(k)s decline, their college savings fund for their kids declined. People haven't seen a lot of wage growth, and they feel anxious about the future.

That's a reality, and that means that this election cycle is going to be tough because of that reality. I always am reminded of what Michelle told me a while back. I had mentioned some poll where we were having some difficulty, and she said, look, let me tell you something. If somebody calls me at 8:00 p.m., right after dinner, and I spent my whole day thinking about getting my kids to school, worrying about whether my job is going to be there next week, my house is \$100,000 underwater, and somebody asks me, how are things going in Washington? I promise you, I'm going to say, not very well.

And she's right. I mean, that's people's natural, understandable instinct. Having said all that, what you find when you go on the road is people absolutely understand that—the magnitude of this crisis, but it could have been much worse. They are glad to see that an economy that was shrinking by 6 percent is now growing again. They're glad to see that where we were losing 750,000 jobs the month I was sworn in, that we're now seeing 8 consecutive months of job growth.

They feel as if things have stabilized somewhat. The real question now is less looking backwards than it is looking forward. What they're concerned about predates this crisis. It has to do with a sense that our position in the world has slipped and that if we don't act like adults, get serious and start moving forcefully to deal with our education system so that we're producing more engineers and scientists and skilled workers; if we're not moving forward seriously on an energy policy that frees us from dependence on foreign oil and makes sure that our economy is not vulnerable; if we're not serious about controlling our health care costs both for families and businesses and for the Federal Government; and if we're not serious about making sure that here in Washington whatever money going out is matched by money coming in, if we're not serious about those things, then they're worried.

On the other hand, they genuinely believe, and are rooting for us coming up with a plan that can rally the country together and move us forward. And I think they're—when it comes to me, what they're most concerned about is, is that having come in with so much hope, it seems as if we're still having the same arguments here in Washington that we were having 5 years ago and that we were having 10 years ago, and that we were having 15 years ago. And they just understand that we can't afford to have the same arguments over and over again.

And so one of the things that I've tried to say not just to Democrats, but also to Independents and Republicans, is that, that hope you were feeling when I came in, there's no reason to lose it because the answers are still within our grasp. We know how to create schools that work for kids. We know what we need to do on the energy front that would put us at the—as a leader in clean energy and would mean that hybrid cars and electric vehicles and advanced battery technology was made here in the United States instead of some other country. We know what we need to do to shore up Social Security.

The problem is not that we don't know how to do it; the question is do we have the will to do it. And all of that depends on whether you, the American people, are willing to stay engaged, understanding that democracy is messy and it's tough, but that if we keep on moving forward and we stay with it, that there's no reason why we can't deliver on the change that so many people believed in back in 2008.

And when people are reminded of that, that this never was going to be easy but when people come together they can make a difference, you can see them get a little more pep in their step.

We had a rally in Madison, Wisconsin, where we had 27,000 people show up. I was amused. One of the press reports was, well, people greet Obama happily but without the euphoria of 2008. *[Laughter]* And I was there in 2008, and I was—*[laughter]*—and I was there 2 days ago, and I have to say they seemed equally euphoric. *[Laughter]* They were pretty energized. They were fired up and ready to go.

And so they're hungry to get reengaged. And in these backyard meetings that we've had with families, there are serious questions about, look, what are you going to be able to do to make sure that my son who's graduating from college is going to be able to find a job; or I'm still kind of worried about the health care law, what can we do about that; or a senior citizen asking how are my savings going to be affected by your current economic policies. They're pointed questions. But so many of the questions have to do with we want to continue to believe that the American Dream is alive and well.

And they are not persuaded by the other side. They really aren't. I mean, the polling confirms this. And I forgot to mention how hard Tim Kaine is working as our chairman of the

Democratic Party. But they're not persuaded by the other folks' arguments. They haven't gone through complete amnesia here. I mean, they remember that between 2001 and 2009, we had the most sluggish job growth since World War II, and that we took record surpluses to record deficits, and that a rash of deregulation resulted in many of the crises that we've seen over the last several years, and that the average wages of middle class families went down 5 percent during that period.

So it's not as if they are persuaded by the other side. But they do want an affirmative vision from us about how we can move forward.

Now, one last point I'll make. Both myself and Joe Biden, I think, have been recorded as saying to Democrats, you guys got to buck up a little bit. I want to be very clear what I mean here. I think one of the healthy things about the Democratic Party is we've got a big tent, and unlike the other side, if you take a look at our coalition, it is entirely representative of America, regionally, racially—across the board. And that means that sometimes we're going to have some vigorous arguments. Some Blue Dog from Arkansas is not going to believe the same thing as a liberal from Oakland, California. And it means that on any single issue that we've moved forward on, people want to shade it a little bit this way or shade it a little bit that way.

But what I'm reminding folks of is, if you take a look at what we said we were going to do when we were campaigning in 2008, and you now look 2 years later, despite that fact that we're going through the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, we have fulfilled so many of these promises in a way that is unmatched by just about any Congress and any Democratic administration since at least the 1960s, and maybe before that.

And what that means is—I said this in an interview a while back—part of being a Democrat, I guess, is kind of looking at the glass half empty sometimes and thinking, oh, gosh, we didn't get this, and we didn't get that, and I'm still dissatisfied that that hasn't happened. But you know what, now is the time to remind ourselves of what we have accomplished and to recognize that all those things that remain undone will not get done unless we are just as focused, just as energized, just as excited as we were in 2008 or 2006. And that is going to make the difference in the race.

We already got news back that just that rally in Wisconsin had a significant impact in what's going on in Russ Feingold's campaign and Mayor Barrett's campaign for Governor. What it was, was really just Democrats kind of waking up. They're saying, gosh, we've got a race to run here. And by the way, we should be excited about what we've done. And we've got a serious choice to put before the American people.

Well, if we can duplicate that same kind of energy and motivation and focus, then I'm absolutely confident that we can not only maintain our majorities in the House and the Senate, but we can continue to deliver for middle class Americans out there, and folks who aspire to be in the middle class, who really are the beating heart of our economy and the beating heart of the Democratic Party.

So I am so grateful to all of you for staying committed and staying engaged. I'm going to need all of you to keep it up. And I'm going to need each and every one of you to make sure that you're talking to your friends, your neighbors, your coworkers, your family members to make sure that they're fired up and energized, and that they understand the stakes in this election.

And if you do, and if we get that kind of coalescing around our vision for a brighter future, then I'm absolutely confident that we're going to do well. And I know Tim is too.

So, thank you. But don't rest. You'll have time to rest on November 3d, okay? [*Laughter*]  
And hopefully it will be a rest that will be well deserved because we'll take satisfaction in understanding that we're going to be able to keep on moving this country forward.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:40 p.m. at the residence of John Phillips and Linda Douglass. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Thomas M. Barrett of Milwaukee, WI. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 1. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Democratic National Committee dinner.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Barrett, Thomas M.; Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Douglass, Linda; Feingold, Russell D.; Kaine, Timothy M.; Obama, Michelle; Phillips, John.

*Subjects:* Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; District of Columbia : Democratic Party events; Economy, national : Household incomes, decline; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Standards and school accountability; Elections : 2010 congressional elections; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Energy : Alternative energy products and technologies, U.S. production; Energy : Alternative energy products and technologies, U. S. production; Energy : Domestic sources; Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Housing : Foreclosure rates; Social security and retirement : Social Security reform; Wisconsin : Democratic Party events; Wisconsin : President's visit.

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