

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser in New York City
April 27, 2011

The President. Hello, hello, hello! Thank you. Thank you, everybody. Everybody, have a seat. Thank you. My name is Barack Obama. I was born in Hawaii. [Laughter] I'm President of the United States, and I'm running for reelection. Nobody checked my ID on the way in. [Laughter] But just in case—[laughter].

We've got some wonderful guests here today. First of all, two of the finest Senators that you could ever hope to have, the senior Senator from the great State of New York, Chuck Schumer is in the house. And the far more attractive—[laughter]—junior Senator, Kirsten Gillibrand is here. One of my great friends, somebody who I always enjoyed being with when I was in the United States Senate, from the great State of New Jersey, Frank Lautenberg is in the house.

To all the Members of Congress who are here; to all the New York State and New York City elected officials who are here: Thank you for the extraordinary work that you do each and every day. We're very proud of you.

To the Knicks, Jets, Giants, Rangers: Thank you for bringing hope back to New York City. My Bulls are doing pretty good, though. [Laughter] I mean, I'm just saying. [Laughter] Did I hear a boo there? Come on. [Laughter]

So look, I do not have prepared remarks partly because I'm among friends. And what I do want to talk to you a little bit about is not just the campaign that's coming up, but where we've been over the last 2½ years and where we need to go over the next 20.

When we ran in 2008, I think all of us had a sense that America was at a crossroads, that for the previous decade, what had happened to families all across America was they were working just as hard as they'd ever worked; they were fulfilling their responsibilities to their family, to their communities; volunteering in their synagogues, churches, places of worship; they remained committed to achieving the American Dream through hard work, and yet somehow it felt like that dream was slipping away.

During those 10 years, the income and wages of the average American actually went down when you factored in inflation. The economy was growing. A lot of us in this room were doing very well, but for a lot of folks, their life chances felt diminished. And when they looked out on the horizon, it looked like things weren't going to get better, they were going to get tougher.

And that was all before the worst recession since the Great Depression. By the time I was sworn in, we had already lost 4 million jobs in the previous 6 months. In the next 6 months, before our economic policies had a chance to take effect, we lost another 4 million. The financial system was on the brink of collapse. We were about to see the liquidation of the U.S. auto industry.

And yet because of the work, in part, of people like Chuck and Kirsten and Carolyn and others who worked so hard in Congress, what we were able to do is right the ship. We had to take some unpopular decisions, and we had to do some things that people weren't sure were going to work. But we made those tough decisions. And as a consequence, an economy that was shrinking is now growing. An economy that was shedding jobs over the last 13 months,

we've created 2 million jobs in the private sector. The stock market is almost fully recovered. The financial system has stabilized. And people have a sense that this recovery may finally start building some steam.

And along the way, we did a few other things, like make sure that families in this country who get sick don't get bankrupt or lose their homes because of it, because we passed health care reform.

We passed laws to make sure that equal pay for equal work was a reality here in the United States of America and my daughters don't have to settle for less. We put a couple more women on the Supreme Court—lord knows we need them—including the first Latina on the Supreme Court, Sonia Sotomayor.

We changed the financial aid system, the student loan system. We were giving subsidies to banks unnecessarily and restricting the amount of help that young people who wanted to go to college could get. And because of changes that we made, you've got millions of young people all across the country who are now able to go to college and take on less debt and achieve their dreams.

We brought home 100,000 troops from Iraq like we promised, and the rest of them are going to be home by the end of this year. We signed a peace—a nuclear reduction treaty with the Russians. We made sure that anybody who wants to serve in our military can serve regardless of sexual orientation.

So we got a lot of work done. That's just a partial list. But what I want to talk to you about today is the fact that what we've done isn't enough. We've got more work to do. I get letters from about 40,000 people every day, letters or e-mails. And my staff responds to all of them, but I get a chance to read about 10 of them each night. And these letters are inspiring, but they can also be heartbreaking, because you will hear from a father who writes about what it's like to send 16 resumes out, 20 resumes out, 30 resumes out, and not getting a response, trying to figure out how he explains to his children why they're having to cut back.

Or you get a letter from a child who says, "My parents tell me we may have to sell our home and, Mr. President, is there something that you can do?" I'll get letters from the families of servicemembers who have been killed in action in Afghanistan. And I'll get letters from young people who are hoping to go to college, but aren't sure whether they're going to be able to afford it.

And when I read these letters I'm reminded of why we started on this journey together 3, 4 years ago. I'm reminded that the only reason for public service is not for the perks of office, it's not for the title, it's to be an advocate for all those families: to make sure that America is as good to the next generation as it's been to us.

Now, I look around this room, and a sizable percentage of all of you, your parents might have been immigrants. Your parents might not have had a lot, but they had hopes and dreams for you. They understood that if they worked hard, if they were willing to sacrifice, if they were willing to pour all that blood, sweat, and tears into you, that you might be able to achieve something they couldn't imagine achieving.

And the reason I ran for President is because I want to make sure that's true for the next generation. I want to make sure that every family out there feels that way: that if they do the right thing, if they're working hard, that they can achieve. And we know how to do it. We know how to do it.

We believe in free enterprise. We believe in entrepreneurship. We believe in individual liberties. We believe in self-help. But we also believe in community. We also believe in looking out for one another. We also believe in the American family. We also believe that America, at its best, is one that invests in education for everybody and invests in science and technology for the future and invests in infrastructure so we can move people and services and products all around the world and invests in our seniors to make sure that they can retire with dignity and respect and looks after the most vulnerable, looks after that child with autism or that child with a severe disability. That's who we are. That's what we believe. And that's the America I want to leave to Malia and Sasha. That's the America that you want to leave to your kids.

And we can achieve it. We're part of the way there, but we're not all the way there. We've still got a lot of work to do. We still have a lot of work to do. And that's what this budget debate that has dominated Washington over the last several months and will dominate Washington over the next year, year and a half, is all about.

It's not about numbers. We all agree that we have to reduce our deficit and get a hold of our debt. We even agree on roughly the amounts by which the deficit and the debt have to be reduced. This argument is not about numbers, it is about values. Because on one side you have folks who believe that we can slash education funding by 25 percent or transportation funding by 30 percent or investments in clean energy by 70 percent and we can turn the Medicare system into a voucher program so that we're shifting costs on to seniors. It's a vision of a small America, of a shrunken America, where those of us who are lucky do great and don't have to give anything back and we can pull up the ladder behind us.

And then there's another vision that says we can live within our means as a Government, we can act responsibly in terms of our budget, but we can make sure that the burden is shared, that the sacrifices are spread around.

And the reason we believe that is not out of charity. The reason we believe that is we think that our lives are better, if when we're driving down the street and we see those kids in a well-funded, well-run school that's teaching them something, we know that New York City, New York State, and the United States of America are going to be better places for us. They're going to be more safe and more secure.

We do it not just out of charity, but because it makes our lives better. We know that when we see that elderly couple strolling through Central Park, holding hands, and they know that they've got the security of Medicare and Medicaid and Social Security, that that makes us better, because we think, you know, someday I want to be Michelle—I want it to be me and Michelle strolling down Central Park. There's going to be a time where I can go walking again. And I would want to make sure that I've got some security in those golden years.

We imagine a big America where we're investing in the same kind of science that invented the Internet. We want to invent the next big energy breakthrough that is going to make sure that we're no longer dependent on foreign oil and we can start finally doing something about climate change and we're not vulnerable to huge spikes in gasoline prices. We want that transformation starting here in the United States of America.

And we want the best roads and the best airports, because we've always had the best stuff. We want the fastest broadband lines. And we want the highest graduation rates from college. That's who we are. That's the country we want to pass on to the next generation, and that's what this budget debate is all about.

Don't let folks fool you, saying this is somehow about some dry number somewhere. This is about our values; the kind of country we want to pass on to the next generation. And I'm confident that vision of a big, generous, compassionate America, that's the vision that most Americans share.

So we're going to have some work to do. This is not going to be easy. In 2008, I didn't have all this gray hair. [Laughter] I was kind of fresh and new. I was, like, the hip thing. [Laughter] Everybody had the nice posters. [Laughter] You know, so it was cool to back Obama. [Laughter] And now I'm older. [Applause] That's okay. Let's face it, I'm a little older.

Audience member. Distinguished!

The President. Distinguished, that's the word I'm looking for—[laughter]—distinguished. And we've had some setbacks, and some things haven't happened as fast as people wanted them to happen. I know. I know the conversations you guys have. [Laughter] Oh, he didn't get the public option, and—[laughter]—gosh. I wish that that energy bill had passed. I understand the frustrations. I feel them too.

But here's what I know, when I stood in Grant Park that night, I told all of you this is not going to be easy. I didn't say, "Change you could have tomorrow." [Laughter] I said, "Change we can believe in." But it requires faith. It requires us working hard. It requires staying with it. It requires persistence.

That's why I'm going to need you, every single one of you. And if you join with me in 2012, I guarantee you we're going to get the job done.

Thank you, everybody. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:08 p.m. at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney; and Supreme Court Associate Justice Elena Kagan. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 28.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Democratic National Committee fundraiser in New York City.

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Names: Gillibrand, Kirsten; Kagan, Elena; Lautenberg, Frank R.; Maloney, Carolyn B.; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Schumer, Charles E.; Sotomayor, Sonia M.

Subjects: Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Casualties; Armed Forces, U.S. : "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, repeal; Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with Russia, expansion; Budget, Federal : Automobile industry :: Decline; Budget, Federal : Congressional spending restraint; Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Budget, Federal : Fiscal year 2012; Civil rights : Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009; Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Economy, national : Credit markets, stabilization efforts; Economy, national : Household incomes, decline; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : American Graduation Initiative; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, elimination of subsidies to private providers; Education, Department of : Funding; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and

growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: Promotion efforts; Energy : Domestic sources; Energy : Gasoline, oil , and natural gas costs; Environment : Climate change; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Judiciary : Supreme Court :: Associate Justices; New York : Democratic Party events; New York : President's visits; Russia : Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with U.S., expansion ; Science and technology : Research and development; Social Security and retirement : Social Security program; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts.

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