

*Administration of Barack Obama, 2011*

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

*The President.* Hello, New York! Thank you. How's everybody doing tonight? Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. All right, everybody—everybody, have a seat. Have a seat. Thank you.

Are you fired up? Is that what you're saying? I'm fired up too. My name is Barack Obama. I was born in Hawaii, the 50th State of the United States of America. No one checked my ID on the way in—[*laughter*]*—*but just in case—[*laughter*].

I was out in Chicago earlier today. I was taping "Oprah" for one of her last shows. I was a little disappointed, though. When I looked under my seat, there was nothing there. [*Laughter*] There—

*Audience members.* [*Inaudible*]

*The President.* The—

*Audience members.* Boo!

*The President.* See, there's always something going on in New York City. [*Laughter*] Always.

*Audience member.* We love you!

*The President.* I love you back.

So it is good to get out of DC. DC is a wonderful town, but the conversation you hear in Washington is just a little different than the conversation you usually hear around the kitchen table or around the water cooler.

And that's why we recently decided that our reelection campaign will be the first one in modern history to be based outside of Washington, DC. We're going back to Chicago, because I don't want a campaign where I'm just hearing from lobbyists and pundits and powerbrokers. I want our campaign to be hearing from the people who helped me to get to the Oval Office. I want to be hearing from you.

We're making sure we're putting the campaign in your hands, the same organizers, the same volunteers, the same people who proved that we could do—

*Audience member.* [*Inaudible*]

*The President.* Okay.

*Audience member.* [*Inaudible*]

*The President.* Okay, thank you. All right, so let me just say—no, they can stay. I think they made their point. They're all right. That's all right. But if any of the rest of you have something to say—[*laughter*]*—*let's just knock it out right now. So—[*laughter*].

All right, where was I? [*Laughter*] I was talking about ordinary people doing extraordinary things. And by the way, I just want you to know that Jim Messina, who has been by my side since this campaign began, he is going to do a great job. He is going to be doing a great job on our behalf. We're very proud of him.

Which reminds me, by the way, I know the reason you guys are all fired up is because the Roots were playing. *[Laughter]* So give the Roots a big round of applause.

So that's what this campaign is still about. It's your campaign. It's not my campaign, it's your campaign.

Now, a few things have changed since 2008. I'm a little grayer. *[Laughter]*

*Audience member.* Looking good!

*The President.* Thank you. *[Laughter]* Thank you. Michelle thinks so also. *[Laughter]* You know, I've got a few dents, a few dings in the fender. But all of us can still remember that night in Grant Park—the excitement, the sense of possibility. And I hope you also remember what I said back then. I said this wasn't the end, this was the beginning, that our climb was going to be steep to the summit where we wanted to get to.

Now, it turns out the climb was a little steeper than we expected. *[Laughter]* We took office during the worst recession since the Great Depression, one that left millions of Americans without jobs, hundreds of thousands of people without homes. It was a recession that was so bad that we still see the lingering effects, people still grappling with the aftershocks.

So we had to make some tough decisions, and some of those decisions weren't always popular. But 2½ years later, an economy that was shrinking by 6 percent is now growing. Over the last 4 months, we've seen the largest drop in unemployment since 1984. Over the last year, we've added nearly 2 million jobs to the private sector.

Some of those things that folks said wouldn't work, they worked. Remember, we were about to see the U.S. auto industry liquidate. Now GM has hired back all its workers, and the Big Three are making a profit again. But we've still got work to do.

*Audience member.* Oh, yes, we do. *[Laughter]*

*The President.* *[Laughter]* We do. She's just speaking the truth. We still got work to do. You know, when I decided to run—and some of you were on this journey 3 years ago, 4 years ago, when folks couldn't pronounce my name—*[laughter]*—what we understood was that even before the recession, folks all across the country were feeling that that American Dream was starting to slip out of their grasp.

I look out, and one of the things I love about coming to New York is, it is so representative of what America has always been: people coming from all corners of the world. Immigrants, people traveling in search of opportunity and saying to themselves, you know, if I work hard, if I take care of my responsibilities, if I pour all that blood, sweat, and tears into a future for my children and grandchildren, there's nothing they can't achieve. Now, that's the idea of America. That's the idea of New York City.

And all across this country, there are people who still believe in that. They're working so hard every day. They're looking after their families. They're looking after their communities. They're in their churches and synagogues and mosques. They're volunteering. They're mentoring. They're coaching Little League. And yet they've been feeling, even before the recession hit, that maybe this American Dream, this idea of America was starting to slip away.

They had seen 10 years in which the average income, average wage of Americans had fallen, a country that was becoming more unequal, a country where even if you worked hard, you might not be able to retire with the kind of security that you used to expect, a country

where the cost of college tuition was skyrocketing, where getting sick might mean that you lose everything you had.

And so we understood America was at a crossroads and that we were going to have to make some serious changes to ensure that the kind of America we believed in was going to be there in the future. That's what we were fighting for, where every child in America can live that life of opportunity, where every family feels like that dream is theirs. It's an idea of America where we're looking out for one another, where folks who are poor or disabled or infirm or in their golden years, that they know they've got a community.

We believe in free markets. We believe in entrepreneurship. We believe in personal responsibility and self-help. But we also believe that we're a family. And we also believe in an America that's—[*applause*]*—*we also believe in an America that's growing and the next generation does better than this one, more prosperous than it was before. And that prosperity is shared. It's not just for a few, but it's for everybody. That's the summit we wanted to reach.

And look, for all the things we've gotten done, we're not there yet. My biggest adversaries aren't my political opponents. My biggest adversary is the cynicism that can be so corrosive when people stop believing in this idea of America. And what we've always been about is understanding that there's nothing we can't achieve if we're working together. And it's going to take a couple more years to get there. It might take more than one term to get there. But I'm reminded every night when I read letters from families all across America that we have no choice but to get there.

Some of you know that I read 10 letters a night out of the 40,000 or so that we get. And these letters are inspiring, but they are also sometimes heartbreaking. You read a letter from a father who's sent out 20, 30, 40 resumes and hasn't gotten a response back; or a child writes and says, "My parents are about to lose their home. Is there something that you can do?" You hear from parents of those who've fallen in Afghanistan, or you hear about a young person who is not sure whether they're going to be able to afford to go to college, and you're reminded of why we did this, the commitment we made to each other.

Those are the Americans I'm thinking about every day when I wake up. I think about them when I go to bed at night. They are the reason you elected me President. You didn't elect me so that I'd have a fancy title or a nice place to live. My house in Chicago was just fine. [*Laughter*] You elected me to make a real difference in the lives of people across this country, to make sure they were getting a fair shot.

And we've been able to make great progress over the last few years. But that progress shouldn't make us complacent. It should remind us that change is possible. And it should inspire us to finish what we started.

Because of you, we were able to prevent a second great depression. But in the next few years, we've got to make sure that the new jobs and industries of our time are started right here in the United States of America. In the next few years, we have to make sure that America is prepared to win the future.

Because of you, we ended wasteful taxpayer subsidies that were going to banks and instead used those savings to provide millions of students more affordable student loans and grants.

Because of you, we've raised standards for teaching and learning in schools across the country through what we call Race to the Top. But now we've got to finish reform and make sure every child is graduating and ready for college and ready for a career and that we're

prepared to out-educate and out-compete every other nation in the world. That's how America will succeed.

Because of you, we made the largest investment in clean energy in our history, and that's already changing how jobs and businesses across the country are thinking about energy. We're creating new businesses: advanced battery manufacturing and plants building wind turbines and solar panels. But at a time when gas prices are——

*Audience member.* Four dollars. [*Laughter*]

*The President.* ——just killing folks——tough. A lot of truth-tellers here. [*Laughter*]

We've got a lot more work to do to have an energy policy that works. We're going to have to keep on making those investments. And by the way, we can afford them. You know, for \$4 billion, we could do an awful lot. And you know where we could get \$4 billion is by ending taxpayer subsidies we give to oil companies and gas companies. That's profits coming from your pocket into their pocket. They're making enough profit. We should be investing in the energy of the future, not yesterday's energy.

Because of you, we've put hundreds of thousands of people back to work rebuilding our crumbling infrastructure, our roads, our bridges. You know, part of America has always been building stuff, having the best stuff: trains and roads and ports and airports, and now in the 21st century, high-speed rail and the best wireless and the best broadband to make sure that we're pulling this economy together.

But you know what, we've fallen behind. Today, South Korea has faster high-speed Internet than we do. We created the Internet. [*Laughter*] We should be leading. We shouldn't be 2d or 3d or 5th or 16th place when it comes to technology, innovation, investing in basic science and research.

Because of you, we did what we said we were going to do——what we tried to do for almost a century——and that is, we said health care should no longer be a privilege, it should be a right in a country this wealthy. We said you should never go bankrupt because you get sick. Your child should be able to get health care even if they've got a preexisting condition. That's because of you.

Because of you, we passed Wall Street reform that makes sure that the financial system doesn't go through what it went through again and, along the way, that you as a consumer aren't getting cheated when it comes to applying for a credit card or a mortgage.

Because of you, we passed laws that make sure that an equal day's pay is an equal day's work, because I don't want Sasha and Malia being treated second-class. That's one of the reasons we put two women on the Supreme Court.

Because of you, we overturned "don't ask, don't tell," because we want everybody to be able to serve their country, regardless of who they love.

Because of you, we removed 100,000 troops from Iraq, like we said we were going to do.

*Audience member.* Thank you!

*The President.* That's because of you.

*Audience member.* And you!

*The President.* Now we've got to protect the changes we've made, and we've got to keep on moving forward to get done the things we didn't get done. We've still got to get

comprehensive immigration reform passed, because we can be a nation of law and a nation of immigrants.

We need to finally break the cycle of one energy crisis after another and start getting on the path of real—a real energy policy that frees ourselves from dependence on foreign oil and cleans up the planet in the process. We've got to leave America better than we found it, and we're not done yet.

So, New York, that's what this debate that we're having in Washington right now is about. Folks talk about budgets and numbers and deficits and debt. And the deficits and debt are serious, and we've got to do something about it. But this is also a debate about values. This is also a debate about what kind of country we believe in.

Yes, we believe in a Government that lives within its means. And I just want to remind people that when I walked into office, we had a trillion-dollar deficit. And some of the same folks who are now talking about deficits voted for two wars that weren't paid for, tax cuts that weren't paid for, a prescription drug policy that was not paid for. But that's somehow all forgotten now. *[Laughter]* A little amnesia there.

But it—but now this is our responsibility. We've got to be serious about cutting spending in Washington. We've got to make cuts in domestic spending, but we also have to make cuts in defense spending. We also have to make cuts in all the loopholes in our Tax Code. Those also have to be cut.

We've got to eliminate every dime of waste, and if we're serious about taking responsibility for the debt that we owe, then we're going to have to make some tough decisions. We've got to decide what we can afford to do without.

*Audience member.* Guantanamo!

*The President.* Case in point. And we've got to make sure that the burdens and the sacrifices of getting a handle on our debt and our deficit, that they're shared. But we also have to remind ourselves of the kind of America that we believe in, the kind of America that allowed us to live out our American Dream.

We're not going to pull up the ladder behind us. I'm not going to reduce our deficit by sacrificing the things that always made us great as a people. I'm not going to sacrifice investments in education. I'm not going to make scholarships harder to get and more expensive for young people. I'm not going to sacrifice the safety of our highways or our airports. I'm not going to sacrifice clean air and clean water. I'm not going to sacrifice clean energy at a time when we need to free ourselves from dependence on foreign oil and folks are getting killed at the pump. I'm not going to sacrifice America's future.

There's more than one way to mortgage America's future. We mortgage that future if we don't get a handle on our deficit and debt, but we also mortgage it if we're not investing in those things that will assure the promise of the American Dream for the next generation.

And so part of this budget debate has to be about ending tax cuts for the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans in this country. I say that—*[applause]*—look, I say that not because I want to punish success. It's because if we're going to ask all Americans to sacrifice a little bit, we can't just say to millionaires and billionaires, you guys go ahead, don't worry about it. *[Laughter]* Just keep on counting your money. *[Laughter]*

I'm talking about myself. Look, I don't want a \$200,000 tax cut that's paid for by asking 33 seniors each to pay \$6,000 more in Medicare costs. I don't want that. I don't want a tax cut that's paid for by slashing Head Start slots for young people here in New York City or eliminating health insurance for millions of people currently on Medicaid, seniors in nursing homes and poor kids and families with children with autism or other disabilities. That's not a tradeoff I'm willing to make. That's not a tradeoff most Americans are willing to make. That's not who we are. We are better than that. That's what this debate is about. We're better than that.

What makes America great isn't just our skyscrapers. It's not our military might. It's not the size of our GDP. All those things are things that we are rightly proud of. But at our core, what makes us great is our character. We are individualists. We believe in free markets. We are entrepreneurs. We believe that each of us is endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights and liberties. We don't like folks telling us what to do. [*Laughter*] That's part of what makes us American.

But what also makes us American is the idea that we're all in this together, that I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper, and that when I look out for somebody else, I'm not doing it out of charity. If I'm driving through Harlem and I see a well-constructed school and young people that I know are being taught what they need to learn, my life is better. I know I'll be safer and I'll—and I know that as a country we'll be aligned. We'll be moving together forward, hand in hand, and this country will be less divided. My life will be better.

If I'm driving by Central Park and I see an elderly couple strolling, holding hand in hand, and I think to myself, you know, someday that's—Michelle and me, we're going to be strolling hand in hand, and I'll be able to take a walk in Central Park again, and nobody will recognize me and—[*laughter*]—but it makes me feel good to know that that couple, they've got Social Security, they've got Medicare, that they've got a sense of dignity and security in their golden years.

It's not charity. It makes my life better. No man is an island. We're not here by ourselves. That's our vision of America. It's not a vision of a small America. It's a vision of a big America that is compassionate and generous and bold and optimistic.

I don't want a cramped idea of America. I don't want an idea of America that says, no, we can't, and we can't afford to look after folks who need help, and we can't afford to make sure that the ladders of opportunity are available for the next generation, and our seniors have to fend for ourselves, and we can't afford to rebuild our infrastructure, and we can't afford to invest in science and basic research. That's not the America I know.

I want a confident America where, yes, everybody makes sacrifices, but nobody bears all the burden and we live up to the idea that no matter who we are, no matter what we look like, no matter whether our ancestors landed on Ellis Island or came here on a slave ship or crossed the Rio Grande, we are all connected to one another. We rise and fall together.

That's the idea at the heart of America. That's the idea at the heart of America. That's the idea at the heart of our campaign. That's why I'm running again. That's why I need your help more than ever. We are still at the early stages, but we've got to get out of the gate strong.

I know there are times where some of you felt frustrated, where we haven't gotten everything done that we wanted to get done. I know you guys. [*Laughter*] Why did health care take so long? And we didn't get our public option—[*laughter*]—you know, it's like, you know,

what are we doing about this energy thing? It's not happening fast enough. And, look, small business—you know. [Laughter]

I know all of you—I've got a couple thousand political consultants here. [Laughter] And sometimes—oh, you know, how come Obama's not communicating properly? And it's like we're—they're—we're—and their narrative, and we have to—you know, I see your comments. [Laughter] And you look wistfully at the poster and—[laughter]—you remember that day in Iowa. [Laughter] I know. [Laughter] Then your friends come and talk to you and—oh, Obama's changed. He's—[laughter].

*Audience member.* I love you, Mr. President!

*The President.* But what I'm saying—we know this wasn't going to be easy, though. A journey like this one, we knew there were going to be setbacks and detours and times when we stumbled. People act like—sometimes I read folks talking about how his campaign was so brilliant and so smooth. These people weren't on the campaign. [Laughter] I remember us screwing up all the time during the campaign. [Laughter]

But as is true in the campaign, so has it been true for America that each and every juncture in our history, when our future was on the line, when we hit that fork in the road, we came together. We solved our problems. We transformed ourselves from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy to an information economy. We absorbed new waves of immigrants. We made sure that we finally eradicated the stain of slavery and made sure that women were full participants in our democracy. We managed to move forward not as Republicans or Democrats, but as Americans, as one people and as one nation.

So when you hear people saying, well, our problems are insoluble, when you confront the cynicism of others or sometimes your own, I just want you to think about all the progress we've already made. I want you to think about all of the business that we've got ahead of us. I want you to remember those words that summed up what we've been about and the commitment we made to each other: Yes we can.

Thank you, everybody. God bless you. Thank you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:49 p.m. at the Town Hall. In his remarks, he referred to talk show host Oprah Winfrey; and James A. Messina, manager, Obama 2012 reelection campaign. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 28.

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Funding; Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Economy, national : Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act; Economy, national : Household incomes, decline; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Income inequality, increase; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : High school dropout rate; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, elimination of subsidies to private providers; Education, Department of : Race to the Top Fund; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Energy : Foreign sources; Energy : Gasoline, oil, and natural gas costs; Energy : Hybrid and alternative fuel automobiles; Energy : National energy policy; Energy : Oil and gas industry :: Subsidies, elimination; Energy : Solar and wind energy; Environment : Air quality, improvement efforts; Environment : Water quality, improvement efforts; Health and Human Services, Department of : Head Start programs; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Health and medical care : Seniors, prescription drug benefits; Housing : Housing market :: Decline; Immigration and naturalization : American "melting pot"; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Judiciary : Supreme Court :: Associate Justice; New York : Democratic Party events; New York: President's visits; Science and technology : Global competitiveness; Social Security and retirement : Social Security program; Taxation : Tax Code :: Reform; Taxation : Tax cuts, budgetary effects; Taxation : Tax relief; Transportation : Highway system, modernization efforts; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts; Transportation : Mass transit and rail infrastructure, improvement efforts; Voluntarism.

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