

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

**Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser in St. Louis,
Missouri**

October 4, 2011

The President. Hello, hello, hello! It's good to be back in St. Louis. It's close to home. This is close to home. It's good to be back in the Midwest. Good to be——

Audience member. We love you!

The President. I love you too. It's good to be back in Missouri. I know that the Cardinals game is going on right now. I see some of you checking your phones for the score. [*Laughter*] So I'm going to try to be brief, see if I can get you out of here by——

Audience member. [*Inaudible*]

The President. No, no, no. You've got the ninth inning coming up. A couple of people I just want to acknowledge. First of all, you have one of the finest Governors in the country, somebody who is thinking about the families of Missouri every single day, Jay Nixon. Please give him a big round of applause. I want to acknowledge the outstanding mayor of St. Louis, Francis Slay; Congressman Russ Carnahan in the house; St. Louis County Executive Charlie Dooley; Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster. Two people who are not here, but who are great friends, great supporters, I just want to acknowledge them: First of all, somebody who's been a outstanding friend since I started this incredible journey, Claire McCaskill, you're a great Senator, as well as Congressman William Lacy Clay, who are both in DC but doing great work. We are proud of them.

Now, I've come here today because I need your help.

Audience member. Okay. [*Laughter*]

The President. I need your help. I need your help to finish what we started in 2008. Back then, we started this campaign not because we thought it was going to be a cakewalk. I mean, after all, your candidate's name was Barack Obama. [*Laughter*] So we knew that was going to be hard. We didn't need a poll for that. But we forged ahead, because we believed that the essence of this country is that no matter where you come from, no matter what you look like, that if you're willing to work hard, if you're willing to make an effort, you can make it here. You can make it if you try.

Most of us come from families—parents, grandparents—who had this inherent faith in America, that if you did the right thing, worked hard, showed up at work, put your all into it, that you could end up living a good, comfortable life. You could be in the middle class. You could make sure that your kids went to college. You could have a retirement that was comfortable and secure. You could go on a vacation once in a while. Decent salary, good benefits, that was the essence of the American Dream.

And over the last decade, that faith that we've had has been shaken for a lot of people. It felt like the rules changed. The deck got stacked against middle class Americans. The divide between haves and have-nots grew wider. Folks in the middle got squeezed. No one in Washington seemed willing or able to do anything about it, and that's why we launched this campaign. Because we had seen a failed philosophy that just let problems pile up, put more and more burden on ordinary folks, and in 19—in 2007, all of this culminated in a once-in-a-

lifetime crisis—the biggest financial crisis we've had since the Great Depression, followed by the worst recession we've had since the Great Depression. And that crisis has been much worse and much longer than your average recession.

And from the time I took office, we knew that because we didn't get into this crisis overnight, we weren't going to get out of it overnight, and we were going to have to work hard and plug away slow and steady to make sure that all those piled-up problems, that we started just dealing with them. It was going to take a few years for us to fully recover, but we never lost faith that we could.

So the question now that we face in 2011 is not whether people are still hurting. Of course they are. I get e-mails, I get letters every night from people all across the country who are struggling, and their stories are heartbreaking. Families that—where somebody has lost a job and they're having trouble making the mortgage; maybe they lost their home. Small businesses who had to close, even though they've been in families for generations. Folks having to cross off items off the grocery list so that they can fill up the gas tank and get to work. Parents who are postponing retirement so they can still send their kids to college. I mean, this is tough stuff. And the question is not whether this country is going through tough times. We are. The question is, where are we going next? What's the direction that we're charting for not just ourselves, but for our kids and our grandkids?

Audience member. Will you stop the pipeline?

The President. And we can——

Audience member. President Obama, will you stop the Keystone——

Audience member. Shhh!

The President. We'll be happy to—we can either go back to the ideas that we tried in the last decade where corporations get to write their own rules and wealthy folks get to keep all their tax breaks, or we can build the kind of America that we talked about——

Audience member. God bless you.

The President. ——an America where everybody gets a fair shake, and everybody does their fair share.

And that's what this election is about. That's what we've been fighting for in Washington. When I wanted to save the auto industry from bankruptcy, there were a whole bunch of Republicans in Congress who fought us tooth and nail. Said it was a waste of time, waste of money. You know what? We did it anyway. We saved hundreds of thousands of American jobs. Taxpayers got their money back. Taxpayers got their money back and today the American auto industry is stronger than it's been in years. In fact, Ford just announced its plans to add 12,000 new jobs in its U.S. manufacturing plants over the next few years. A lot of those jobs are right here in Missouri. Jobs making cars stamped with three proud words: Made in America.

And we've got a couple people here who are concerned about the environment? In the process, by the way, we doubled fuel efficiency standards on cars, on trucks, on heavy trucks, getting carbon out of the environment. That's the choice we face. Because we got resistance every step of the way.

When we wanted to pass Wall Street reform to make sure a crisis like this never happens again, we had lobbyists and special interests spend millions to make sure we didn't succeed. And you know what? We did it anyway. We passed the toughest reforms in a generation. And

those reforms ensure that consumers won't get ripped off by mortgage lenders or credit card companies. And no more hidden fees. No more unfair rate hikes. No more deception.

When we looked and said, you know what, we have to make sure that college is accessible because we want to, once again, be number one when it comes to college graduation rates, we were able to cut \$60 billion in taxpayer subsidies to big banks, use those savings to make college more affordable for millions of kids around the country.

Audience member. Hear, hear, Mr. President.

The President. By the way, most Republicans voted against that.

Instead of giving more tax breaks to the biggest corporations, we cut taxes for small businesses and middle class families. First law I signed—first bill I signed into law made sure that women earn equal pay for equal work. I want to make sure my daughters have the same chances as our sons.

And to make sure that those laws are upheld, we appointed two brilliant women to the Supreme Court. We repealed "don't ask, don't tell" so that every single American can serve their country, regardless of who they love. And yes, we passed health care reform because no one in America should go bankrupt because somebody in their family gets sick.

Insurance companies can't drop your coverage for no good reason. They won't be able to deny your coverage because of preexisting conditions. Think about what that means for families all across America. Think about what it means for women.

Audience member. Birth control—

The President. Absolutely. You're stealing my line. Breast cancer, cervical cancer are no longer preexisting conditions. No longer can insurance companies discriminate against women just because you guys are the ones who have to give birth. [*Laughter*]

Audience member. Darn right!

The President. Darn tooting. [*Laughter*] They have to cover things like mammograms and contraception as preventive care, no more out-of-pocket costs. And while it will take a couple of years for all the reforms to fully take place, already we've got seniors all across the country who have gotten \$250 to help them pay for their prescription drug benefit. And nearly 1 million young adults already have health insurance because of it—1 million more young people. That's an incredible achievement. The Affordable Care Act is working.

They call it "Obamacare." I do care, that's right. That's right. The question is, why don't you care? The question is, why don't you care? You should care too. Some of these folks making central to their campaign pledge to make sure that 30 million people don't have health insurance. What kind of inspiring message is that? [*Laughter*]

Now, all these were tough fights in Congress. There are a lot more we still have to win. We've got a long way to go to make sure that everyone in this country gets a fair shake, that everybody has a chance to get ahead. And that's where I need your help.

Now, 3 weeks ago, I sent to Congress a bill called the "American Jobs Act." Everything in this bill has been supported by Democrats and Republicans in the past; nothing radical about this. Everything in it will be paid for. It will put people back to work. It will put money back into the pockets of working families. And Congress should pass this bill right away.

Think about it. Think about—right now we've got millions of construction workers out of work: folks in Missouri, folks in St. Louis, who are desperate to get back to work. This bill says, why don't we put those men and women back to work rebuilding our roads and our bridges and our airports and our schools? I don't want the newest airports built in China. I don't want the best railroads built in Europe. I want them built right here in the United States of America. I want them built in Missouri, with American labor.

I don't want our kids studying in crumbling schools. I want the best schools for our kids. There is work to be done. There are workers to do it. Tell Congress: Pass this bill right away. We don't have the luxury of sitting back.

This bill puts teachers back in the classroom. We know that the most important thing, in order for us to compete as a country, is going to be the quality of education. In places like South Korea, they are hiring teachers in droves. Here in the United States, we're laying them off. It makes no sense. We've got to be able to compete in a global economy. And it's unfair to our kids for us to be shortchanging them because we're not putting teachers in the classroom. It undermines our kids. It undermines our future. If we pass this bill, we will see tens of thousands of teachers back in the classroom where they belong. That's why I need your help. Push them to pass this bill.

This bill gives tax credits to hire veterans, men and women who served our country with incredible honor, put their lives on hold, left their careers, left their families, risked their lives. They shouldn't have to fight to get a job when they come home. This jobs bill helps veterans. This jobs bill helps every single small-business owner in America. Almost every worker in America, they get an extra tax cut if they hire more workers, if they raise workers' wages. Republicans like to talk about job creators; they should actually help job creators. Let's get this jobs bill passed and they'll actually get some relief.

Now, the excuse that a lot of folks have been using for why they haven't passed this thing yet—you know I'm ready to sign it, I've got the pens all ready—*[laughter]*—"Well, we can't support any new spending that's not paid for." Well, I think the deficit is important. We worked hard on that. So recently I laid out a plan that says, not only will this pay for the jobs act, but it will also reduce our deficit and debt even more. Building on the trillion dollars in cuts that we've already made, it makes some tough choices. It says we can't spend on every single thing that we want to. We've got to make some decisions; we've got to make some choices. Cut back on things we don't need to invest in the things that we do. It's one of the biggest spending cuts in history, but that alone doesn't do the job. That alone doesn't put people back to work. It's not enough.

So what we've said is if you are serious about putting people back to work and also closing this deficit, then we've got to make sure that the wealthiest among us—people like me, the biggest, most profitable corporations—they've got to pay their fair share of taxes. We should be reforming our Tax Code based on a very simple principle: Middle class families shouldn't pay higher tax rates than millionaires or billionaires. Warren Buffett's secretary shouldn't pay a higher tax rate than Warren Buffett. A nurse or a construction worker, a plumber making \$50,000 a year, they shouldn't pay higher tax rates than somebody pulling down \$50 million. That's not fair. It's not right.

And it needs to change. Not because we want to punish success in America; America is the land of opportunity. You know what? Go out there with a business idea, with a new product, a new service. Make millions of dollars, make billions of dollars—that's great. But understand

you didn't do it on your own. You did it because somebody invested in your school. Maybe somebody gave you a scholarship to go to college. You're using roads we all built.

You know, everybody can make it if they try, but we don't do it by ourselves. We don't do it by ourselves. Nobody makes it on their own. The reason Michelle and I have been able to be successful is because a previous generation made that investment. We've got to be willing to make that same investment for the next generation. And those of us who have benefited the most from this great country of ours, we can afford to do our fair share. We can afford it.

Some Republicans lately have been saying, well, that's "class warfare." [*Laughter*] But it's interesting, some of you may have caught—there's been a clip floating around lately on television talking about this radical guy who made the simple point that a bus driver shouldn't be paying lower tax rates than a millionaire. And this rabble-rouser was named Ronald Reagan.

So you know what? The next time you're talking to somebody that says that's class warfare, you say, I'm just with Ronald Reagan here. [*Laughter*] That's all I'm saying.

People forget these issues did not used to be partisan issues. They don't have to be. The truth of the matter is, is that our first Republican President—pretty good President—a guy named Lincoln, in the middle of the Civil War built the transcontinental railroad, invested in land grant colleges, started the National Academy of Sciences. Did all these things with an eye towards the future saying, you know what? We can't afford not to invest.

Eisenhower built the Interstate Highway System. Previous generations built the Hoover Dam. Our researchers developed the Internet. These people didn't make it on their own, who are now in Silicon Valley. The reason they're successful is not only because of their extraordinary work, but it's because they're building on the collective effort of America.

Nobody makes it on their own. That's what this country is about. We have always been a land of opportunity and self-reliance and rugged individualism, but we've also looked after each other. We've also said we're in it together. And that's the choice that we face right now. We've got a choice. And so I would love to be able to say, we can do everything we need to make ourselves competitive and sharp and successful in this 21st-century economy and nobody has to do anything. It will just happen. [*Laughter*]

But that's not how the world works. We've got to make choices. So the question is, do we want to maintain special tax breaks for oil companies, or do we make a decision that we'd rather use some of that money to make sure that we're rebuilding America? Do we want to make sure that I keep a tax break that I don't need and wasn't even asking for, or do we want to put teachers back in the classroom?

Those are choices we have to make, and they reflect our values. They reflect who we are as a people.

And I so deeply believe in the American people. We make tough choices when times are tough. We pull together and help each other. It's not always easy. And this is a democracy and there are going to be fierce debates going on. But I'm absolutely positive that we will make the right decisions for our children and our grandchildren.

But in order to do that, I need your help. All right? So I'm going to need you to go out there and I want you to e-mail and fax and tweet and visit and write an old-fashioned letter. [*Laughter*] Tell your Members of Congress: Pass this bill. Let's put people back to work. Let's put construction workers on the job. Let's put teachers in the classroom. Let's give small

businesses a tax break. Let's help our veterans. Pass this bill. Let's meet our responsibilities. Do your job. Do your job.

We had a couple of Republicans quoted in DC saying, "Well, even if we agreed with this stuff we probably don't want to do it, because it might give Obama a win." [*Laughter*] Now, let me tell you something. There's going to be an election, and I'm looking forward to that election. I'm looking forward to the debate. I think we've got better ideas.

But the election is 13 months away, and people are hurting right now. There are folks living paycheck to paycheck, day to day. They can't afford to wait 13 months. So we need to pass this bill now. And if the American people see Washington putting their needs first, putting country before party, thinking about their constituencies, that's going to give people confidence. That's going to restore a sense of hope. People will remember that we've been through tougher times before and we've come through it.

But they need to see their leaders thinking about them for a change, not thinking about how will this affect their polls, how will this affect the next election. They need to feel a sense of urgency about this.

Which brings me back to what we did in 2008. We surprised a lot of people. And yes, I had less gray hair. [*Laughter*] And I know it was exciting to be for the underdog and——

Audience member. You still look good.

The President. Oh, I appreciate it. Thank you. That's what Michelle says. But this election wasn't about me, it wasn't about one person. It was about us. It was about what we could do together. We've got to have that same sense of urgency this time. And if we do have that same sense of urgency, then, for all the things we've done, we can finish what we started. We can put people back to work. We can have an energy policy in this country that actually makes sense and protects our environment. We can make sure that we're dealing with issues like immigration in a serious way, not just to try to demagogue it. We can make sure that we are moving manufacturing back here to the United States of America, putting people back to work making things; not just importing things from other countries, but selling them to other countries.

We can do all those things. But we've got to have a sense of urgency about it. This is going to be harder than it was last time, and it wasn't easy last time. But I have confidence in you. And I have confidence in the commitments you've made to each other. And if all of you are willing to keep on going and knock on doors and make phone calls, and don't get weary, I'm going to be with you every step of the way. And I promise you, we will get through these difficult times. We will fix our politics. And we will remind everybody just why the United States of America is the greatest country on Earth.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:39 p.m. at the Renaissance Grand Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Warren E. Buffett, chief executive officer and chairman, Berkshire Hathaway Inc.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Democratic National Committee fundraisers :: St. Louis, MO.

Locations: St. Louis, MO.

Names: Buffett, Warren E.; Carnahan, J. Russell; Clay, William L., Jr.; Dooley, Charlie A.; Kagan, Elena; Koster, Chris; McCaskill, Claire; Nixon, Jeremiah W. "Jay"; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Slay, Francis G.; Sotomayor, Sonia M.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, repeal; Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Budget, Federal : Government programs, spending reductions; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Strengthening efforts; Business and industry : Manufacturing industry :: Strengthening efforts; Business and industry : Small businesses :: Hiring incentives; Business and industry : Small businesses :: Promotion efforts; Civil rights : Wage equality; Commerce, international : U.S. exports :: Expansion; Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Economy, national : Financial regulations, modernization efforts; Economy, national : Income inequality, increase; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, elimination of subsidies to private providers; Education : School improvement and renovation; Education : Teachers; Elections : 2012 Presidential and congressional elections; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Energy : Fuel efficiency standards, strengthening efforts; Energy : National energy policy; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Health and medical care : Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act; Health and medical care : Seniors, prescription drug benefits; Health and medical care : Young adults :: Insurance coverage as dependents, age limit extension; Immigration and naturalization : Illegal immigration; Missouri : Democratic Party event; Missouri : Governor; Missouri : President's visit; Taxation : Tax Code, reform; Taxation : Tax relief; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts; Veterans : Hiring incentives.

DCPD Number: DCPD201100722.