

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks to Iowa Democratic Caucus Attendees and a Question-and-Answer Session

January 3, 2012

The President. Hello, Iowa! How are you guys? I miss you all. And I understand that it's actually warmer tonight than it was 4 years ago, which means, I'm sure, great turnout at the caucuses.

On the ride over here, I was reminiscing with David Plouffe. He was showing me, actually, an old advertisement from Iowa, in fact, the last advertisement we did in the Iowa campaign. And other than pointing out how much more gray I am and how much older I look now than I did then, we actually were just remembering the incredible energy and excitement and the spirit of common purpose that those Iowa caucuses represent. It was an example of how the campaign was not about one person, but it was about all of us coming together to try to deliver the kind of change that had been talked about a long time in Washington, but all too often hadn't been delivered on.

And it's because of you that I've had this extraordinary honor over the last 3 years of working to try to deliver on that change. And obviously, we didn't know at the time how severe the economic crisis was going to be. We didn't fully appreciate at the time the worldwide magnitude of the financial crisis. But we knew even then that the middle class had been taking it for a long time. Folks who had been trying to get into the middle class had found that the ladders that allowed for upward mobility had started to disintegrate for a lot of people.

And so we understood that what we were fighting for was an America where everybody had a fair shot, everybody did their fair share, that responsibility was rewarded and that the game wasn't fixed, that it wasn't rigged, and that if people did the right thing and worked hard, as so many families who in Iowa and throughout the country, that they were going to be able to live out their piece of the American Dream.

Now we've still got a lot of work to do. But think about the change that was accomplished because of those caucuses 4 years ago. Because of those caucuses 4 years ago, we ended the war in Iraq, as promised; our troops are now coming home.

Because of the work that so many of you did, even before the caucuses 4 years ago, health care is a reality for millions of Americans and seniors have seen the price of prescription drugs lowered and there are 2 million young Americans who are able to keep their insurance, even if they're not getting it through a job. And we're going to be able to say to every American out there who's got a preexisting condition or has gotten a raw deal from an insurance company that they're going to have some meaningful security. They're not going to be bankrupt if they get sick.

Because of you and the work that you did 4 years ago, there are millions of young people all across the country who are able to get more affordable student loans and Pell grants. They're able to afford college and apply themselves so that they can achieve a meaningful career that pays a good wage and provides good benefits. Because of you we've been able to end the policy of "don't ask, don't tell" so that every American who wants to serve this country that they love had that opportunity, regardless of who they love.

So across the board, whether it's doubling fuel efficiency standards on cars or making sure that we've got a more effective system to provide job training for people who've lost their jobs, across the board, you have made a difference. But we all know we've got a lot more work that we have to do.

Although we've passed health care reform, we've passed Wall Street reform, there are a lot of forces that want to push back against it and want to undo some of those changes. And we're battling millions of dollars of negative advertising and lobbyists and special interests who don't want to see the change that you worked so hard—to fully take root. And that's why this time out is going to be in some ways more important than the first time out. Mitch is right: Change is never easy. The problems that we've been dealing with over the last 3 years, they didn't happen overnight, and we're not going to fix them overnight. But we've been making steady progress, as long as we can sustain it. And that's what this is going to be all about.

So the only way we're going to be able to do that is if all of you maintain the same determination, the same energy, the same drive, the same hopefulness, the same optimism about this wonderful country of ours, as was on display 4 years ago. And I want you to know that because of you, because of all the memories I have of being in your living rooms or meeting you in a diner or seeing you over at a campaign office, I have never lost that same source of inspiration that drove me to embark on this journey in the first place. You guys inspire me every single day.

And I want us to remind each other that, as much work as there may be out there before us, there's nothing we can't accomplish when determined citizens come together to make a difference. So thank you, everybody. I could not be prouder. And, Mitch, I think we've got a couple of—time for a couple questions.

Obama for America, Battleground States Director Mitchell Stewart. Yes, we do, sir. And the first question comes out of Coralville. Coralville, can you hear us?

2012 Presidential Campaign

Q. Good evening, Mr. President. I'm Roseann, and I'm here, as you can see, at a full house in the beautiful Performing Arts Center in Coralville, Iowa. How are you tonight?

The President. I'm doing well. How are you?

Q. Well, Mr. President, I think we're having a little difficulty with audio, but I'm going to go ahead with my question.

Thinking about the caucuses 4 years ago, and as you reflected, you delivered your message of hope and change, but we didn't know in 2008 the extent of the problems we were facing, and certainly progress has been a challenge. So I'm wondering now, in 2012, if you still believe in hope and change for America. And I'm also wondering how your reelection campaign is going to help us better understand what we need to do, both as individual citizens and as a country, to achieve the fair society that you spoke about recently in Osawatomie, Kansas.

The President. Well, first of all, I want to make sure you can hear my answer. How's the sound coming through now?

[*At this point, the audience in Coralville applauded, indicating that they could hear the President. There was no audio.*]

Well, in some ways, I'm actually more optimistic now than I was when I first ran, because we've already seen change take place. And part of what 2012 is about is both reminding the American people of how far we've traveled and the concrete effects that some of our work has had in terms of making sure that people have health insurance or making sure that our troops are coming home or making sure that young people are able to go to college. But part of it is also framing this larger debate about what kind of country are we going to leave for our children and our grandchildren.

There is no problem that we face that we cannot solve. But in order to solve it, we've got to make sure that everybody gets a fair shot, and that means that we're investing in things like education, that we're investing in basic science and technology, so we're making things again here in America and we're revitalizing manufacturing and we're not just buying from other countries, but we're selling to other countries, and we're inventing things and encouraging entrepreneurship. It means that we're rebuilding our infrastructure, our roads and our bridges, but also our high-speed rail lines and high-speed Internet access in places like rural Iowa, making sure that everybody who wants to reach a worldwide market is able to do so because they've got the connection to do it.

It also means that those things are going to have to be paid for in a fair way. And obviously, a lot of the debate in Washington over the last several months and over the last year has revolved around how do we create a government that is lean and efficient and effective. And I'm proud of some of the tough decisions that we've been willing to make in terms of pruning back programs that don't work. But if we're going to make the investments that we need for our kids at the same time as we're controlling our deficit, then there's nothing wrong with saying to millionaires and billionaires that we're going to let your tax cuts expire. You can afford it. You've done very well in this society. And I know that—*[inaudible]*—in America, but they have to be asked. And the other party has a fundamentally different philosophy.

The same is true when it comes to the issue of fair play. We, through Wall Street reform, have rolled back policies that allowed credit card companies to jack up your interest rates without alerting you to it or other financial practices that disadvantage consumers.

And so we've said, you know what, we're going to have a consumer watchdog in place to look after you, to make sure that you're not being cheated on credit cards or mortgages. Because if you want to compete in a free market, then you should compete on the basis of price and service and quality, not on the basis of somebody not being able to understand what they're buying.

These basic principles are what's going to be at stake in order for us to succeed. And I think that they're principles that most Americans believe in, that everybody should act responsibly, everybody should do their part, and everybody should be able to travel as far as their work ethic and their dreams will carry them.

And right now all we're getting from the other side—you guys have been hearing it a lot more than I have—I know it's—you've been bombarded, I don't know how you watch TV in Iowa these days—with a different theory that says, we're going to cut taxes for the wealthiest among us and roll back regulations on things like clean air and health care reform and Wall Street reform, and that somehow, automatically, that assures that everybody is able to succeed. I don't believe that. And I don't think any of the people in that auditorium do either.

So it's going to be a big battle, though. I hope you guys are geared up. I'm excited.

Mr. Stewart. Great. Thank you very much, Coralville. Next, we have Cedar Rapids. Cedar Rapids, are you with us? Can you hear us, Cedar Rapids? Hello, Cedar Rapids. Can you hear us?

The President. Hold on one second.

Mr. Stewart. Yes, hold on one second.

The President. I can't hear you yet.

Mr. Stewart. We'll give it 5 more seconds. Folks in Cedar Rapids, can you hear us?

Q. Yes, we can. Yes.

Health Care Reform/2012 Presidential Campaign

Q. Good evening, Mr. President. This is Carol from Cedar Rapids, and I'm honored to be among your volunteers. On the cable talk shows, there is talk about your administration not accomplishing anything. However, I am a breast cancer survivor and was a social worker for 33 years before retiring and know firsthand what a great accomplishment the Affordable Care Act is, among your other achievements. How do you respond to people who say, you have not done enough?

The President. I think the main message that we're going to have in 2012 is that we've done a lot, but we've got a lot more to do, and that's why we need another 4 years to get it all done. But you just mentioned the Affordable Care Act. We know that somebody who's had an illness like cancer, who's a survivor, has trouble getting insurance. Because of the Affordable Care Act, insurance companies are not going to be able to ban people with preexisting conditions. That makes a direct impact on your life and your family's life.

We know that there are 2 million young people who have insurance, because of the Affordable Care Act, who didn't have it before. We know that seniors have seen discounts in their prescription drugs. They're saving billions of dollars all across the country. We know that preventive care, like mammograms, are now available through your insurance, and they can't arbitrarily deny you coverage right when you need care.

So that's just on health care. And it's making an impact on people's lives day to day. But here's the thing. Frankly, not that many people watch cable TV. What they do is they listen to their friends, their neighbors, their coworkers. And that's why what you guys are doing today at the caucus and what you will be doing every day from now until November makes such a difference. Because nobody is a better messenger for the kind of change we're talking about than you. You can tell a story about the difference these policies make in your life in a way that any politician in Washington, including me, can't do.

And one of the things that we learned 4 years ago was that when people at grassroots level are getting involved and they're getting engaged and they're feeling empowered and they're joining hands with each other, that's a powerful force. It can't be stopped. But unfortunately, over the—*[inaudible]*—it's not as focused and concentrated as an election campaign. And so the forces of big money and special interests and lobbyists, they all come to the fore and the pundits and the cable TV dominates the political conversation.

Well, you know what, fortunately in 2012 we've got a chance to respond. And I will put my money on you. I find you a lot more persuasive than anybody on cable TV, and that's why I know we're going to win.

Thank you.

Mr. Stewart. Great. Thank you very much, sir. We appreciate your time. We appreciate Cedar Rapids. We're going to let you get back to the remainder of your caucuses.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:10 p.m. via videoconference from the Capitol Hilton to caucus attendees. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the audio was incomplete.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Iowa Democratic caucus attendees, videoconference remarks and a question-and-answer session.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Plouffe, David; Stewart, Mitchell.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, repeal; Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Business and industry : Credit cards, regulations and consumer protections; Business and industry : Internet commerce; Business and industry : Manufacturing industry :: Strengthening efforts; Communications : Broadband technology; Economy, national : Consumer Financial Protection Bureau; Economy, national : Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Education : Postsecondary education :: Pell grants; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, elimination of subsidies to private providers; Education, Department of : Funding; Elections : 2012 Presidential and congressional elections; Employment and unemployment : Job training assistance; Energy : Fuel efficiency standards, strengthening efforts; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Health and medical care : Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act; Health and medical care : Seniors :: Prescription drug benefits; Health and medical care : Seniors, prescription drug benefits; Health and medical care : Young adults :: Insurance coverage as dependents, age limit extension; Iowa : Democratic Party event; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Science and technology : Research and development; Taxation : Tax cuts, budgetary effects; Transportation : High-speed rail lines, development and expansion; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts.

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