

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks at an Obama Victory Fund 2012 Fundraiser in Los Angeles, California

February 15, 2012

Hello, everybody. It is great to see you. Obviously, I want to, first of all, thank the Bell family, Colleen and Brad, for opening up this spectacular venue and for being such incredible friends. And thanks your kids, too, for putting up with all of us. [*Laughter*]

I want to just make—in addition to the host committee, I want to make two other acknowledgements. First of all, your outstanding mayor, Antonio Villaraigosa, is in the house. And the mayor who is going to be responsible for making sure that we have a great convention in Charlotte, North Carolina, Anthony Foxx is here as well.

So I'm going to be very brief at the top because I want to spend most of this time in conversation and answering your questions, getting your comments and advice.

We've gone through 3 pretty tough years in this country. And as I was just telling the crowd outside, I think when I think back to 2008, nobody here got involved in that campaign because you thought it was going to be easy. The odds were not in favor of Barack Hussein Obama ending up as President of the United States. [*Laughter*] The reason you got involved was because we shared a vision of what this country should be.

We believed in a country where everybody gets a fair shot. It doesn't matter who you are, what you look like, where you come from, if you're willing to put in the sweat and hard work, you're able to achieve. And we believed in a country where everybody does their fair share. It's not just some people who are required to be good citizens, not just some who are required to do the common good, but everybody has to pull their weight. Whether it comes to service, whether it comes to taxes, whether it comes to participation, whether it comes to caring for those who are vulnerable, all of us are called.

The third idea was a country in which everybody follows the same set of rules, a country based on fair play. We don't have one set of rules for Wall Street and a different set of rules for Main Street. We don't have one set of rules for kids who are born into wealthy neighborhoods and another set of rules for kids that are born into poor neighborhoods, that we expect everybody is showing responsibility and everybody is acting in accordance with some of our deepest held values.

And that's what the campaign was about. There were issues, specific things we wanted to accomplish. We wanted to end the war in Iraq; we ended the war in Iraq. We wanted to reinstate rule of law as we're fighting terrorism and stop torture, and we did that. We wanted to make sure that we reversed this economic chaos coming out of the recession where we were losing 750,000 jobs a month, and we're now gaining 250,000 jobs a month and have created 3.7 million jobs over the last 23 months.

We said that in this country nobody should go bankrupt because they get sick. This country is too wealthy for us to allow something like that to happen. And despite all the frustrations and barriers and setbacks that we experienced, we got it done. And right now 2.5 million kids have insurance right now that didn't have it before—2.5 million.

I get letters from young people who say, you know what, I got diagnosed with a treatable cancer—wouldn't have had a chance if it hadn't been for the fact that this health care bill passed, and I was on my parent's health care plan, and I was able to go in and get a checkup. That's happening right now.

We said that it shouldn't matter who you love if you want to serve the country you love. And we ended "don't ask, don't tell." And I was telling the folks outside about the fact that when I was out in Kaneohe Marine Base, working out with marines—which is a bad idea because they're in better shape than you are—[laughter]—on three separate occasions, the marines came up and said, thank you for ending "don't ask, don't tell." And you know what, I didn't even ask them, did it apply to you, because it didn't matter. The point was they understood that the integrity of our Armed Forces would be enhanced, not debilitated, when we got rid of that law.

And so there were a bunch of specific objectives and specific issues that we wanted: making sure that the kids got health care; making sure that we expanded student loans for young people so that the circumstances they were born into wouldn't be a barrier to their ability to achieve; being able to project an America around the world that is based not just on our might, but also on our values.

There were specific things that we did in each of those categories. But the bigger mission in 2008 was everybody getting a fair shot, everybody doing their fair share, everybody playing by the same set of rules. And that's still what this election is about. It's still what this battle is about in this country.

The other side has a very different vision about where they want to take this country. And they've got fervor and sincerity, a vision that says, you know what, it's okay if just a few people do very well and those who are left behind, it's probably their fault. And if we just go back to a philosophy that says we slash taxes for those of us who've been most fortunate—the folks in this room—that somehow that's going to be good for everybody else. If we get rid of regulations that keep our air clean and our water clean, that somehow business will be unleashed. That if we roll back reforms that were designed to make sure that the kind of recklessness that got us in this mess in the first place, that those same institutions have a free hand, that somehow we're going to be better off.

That's their working theory. And it's wrong. And it's not who we are.

And so we've got to fight for what we believe in as much now as we fought for it in 2012. And it's not going to be easy because there are a lot of folks out there who are still hurting. And there are a lot of people out there who, understandably, after just slogging for 3 years and after maybe in some cases slogging for a decade or two decades and seeing their standard of living deteriorating and seeing their home underwater and seeing their families struggling and folks losing jobs. It's understandable that some of them may feel discouraged and feel cynical, and say, you know what, nothing changes.

But part of our job is to say, as tough as it is, as incremental as it sometimes seems, things have changed. And they can change more if we fight for it, if we're determined, if we have confidence in each other, if we decide to unite instead of divide.

And I think the American people, beneath all the pain and hurt and frustration that they feel, they still want to believe that that change is possible and there's still that hope there. They're optimistic, fundamentally, about this country. They love it so deeply.

And our job over the next year is to make sure that they can channel that fundamental optimism and decency and courage and come together to create the kind of country that we want for our kids and our grandkids.

I mentioned outside I am much grayer now than I was when I started this thing. [Laughter] And Mario Cuomo once said that campaigning is poetry and governance is prose. And we've been slogging through prose for the last 3 years and sometimes that gets people discouraged. Because people, they like the poetry. That's what's inspiring. The prose is frustrating because it involves compromises and it involves half-loaves and it involves getting some progress, but not as much as you want. And so people get frustrated.

And I guarantee you, there are all kinds of friends of yours who, when you talk to them—well, Guantanamo is not closed yet or the war in Afghanistan is still raging or why isn't it that the housing crisis hasn't been completely fixed and climate change is still going on. And I understand that. I feel the same way sometimes.

Every morning I wake up and I say, are we doing everything we can to get everything that needs to be done done right now? But one of the things that's happened over the last 3 years is a recognition that nothing beats persistence. Inspiration is wonderful, nice speeches are wonderful, pretty posters—that's great. [Laughter] But what's required at the end of the day to create the kind of country we want is stick-to-it-ness. It's determination. It's saying we don't quit.

And we'll be tacking and zigging and zagging, and sometimes it will feel like there's no wind behind us and we're just sitting there and it's frustrating. But that north star is still out there. And if you are determined, then you'll get there.

And this country has always gotten there. We have always been able to tack towards that north star. And we're not going to stop now. That's what this election is about. That's why you're here. And I couldn't be more excited about the prospect.

All right. Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:07 p.m. at the residence of Bradley P. and Colleen B. Bell. In his remarks, he referred to Bradley C., Caroline C., Charlotte C., and Oliver P. Bell, children of Bradley and Colleen Bell; and former Gov. Mario M. Cuomo of New York. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 16. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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