

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks at an Obama Victory Fund 2012 Fundraiser in Portland, Maine
March 30, 2012

Thank you. Everybody, please have a seat. Have a seat.

Well, first of all, you want Karen and Bonnie having your back because you can tell that they're not going to take no for an answer. [*Laughter*] It is just a thrill to be here. I want to thank both of them. I also want to thank Bobby and Rob, because, like me, they don't shine quite as brightly as their spouses. [*Laughter*] But nevertheless, we are extremely fortunate to be improving our gene pool because of who we married.

A couple of other people I just want to acknowledge. First of all, your outstanding Members of Congress: Chellie Pingree is here; somebody who always is fighting for working people, Mike Michaud is here. One of the true statesmen in the history of American politics, George Mitchell is here. Your former Governor, John Baldacci is here. And one of the best SBA Administrators of all time, Karen Mills is in the house.

Now, I will confess that part of the reason I came here was Michelle just had too good a time. [*Laughter*] She came up here, and she came back, and she was all, "Oh, we had so much fun, and everybody was so nice, and they all thought I was so much better than you, and"— [*laughter*—and I said, "Hold on, time out, time out." [*Laughter*] I said, "I got to get up there too."

I should point out, by the way, that during Michelle's birthday, I did the same thing: I brought a birthday cake and a check. [*Laughter*] So that's where they got the idea. [*Laughter*]

I could not be more grateful to all of you for just the extraordinary reception and hospitality. There are a lot of you who were involved in 2008, and a lot of you who have signed up for a second tour of duty here. And it's truly moving to me, and every time I've come to Maine, we have had this extraordinary reception. And people I think have not just been supportive financially, but more importantly, through organizing and knocking on doors and making phone calls, which has obviously been the hallmark of all our effort and dates back to my own history in politics.

I'm going to speak very briefly at the top because I want to save a lot of time for questions and answers and comments and advice. [*Laughter*]

We've gone through a tough 3 years, this country—as tough as any in our lifetime: the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, the economic aftermath that left millions without work, a collapsed housing market. It's hard to remember sometimes how perilous things were when I was sworn in. The month I was sworn into office, we lost 800,000 jobs in that month alone. We had lost almost 4 million in the months before I took office. And then we would just keep on shedding jobs for the first few months that I was sworn in. The banks were locked up, so even blue-chip companies couldn't get credit. People, I think, genuinely thought that you might see a world financial meltdown. And nobody exactly knew where the bottom was. The stock market, by the way, was about half of what it is today.

And that meant we had to move fast to save the auto industry, to get the banks lending again, to make sure that State governments and local governments didn't have to lay off even

more teachers and first-responders and others that were providing vital services, but frankly, the States and local governments were having trouble being able to afford.

And we moved so fast that in some ways, people didn't fully appreciate the scope and magnitude of what got done in those first 6 months, that first year. Here's the good news: As you look back, from where we were to where we are now, over the last 2 years we've created almost 4 million jobs. We have the strongest manufacturing job growth since the 1990s. The auto industry is back, stronger than it was before. GM is once again the number-one auto company in the world, making profits that are higher than at any time in its 100-year history. We have seen the unemployment rate start ticking down. We're seeing companies hiring again, companies investing again. There's a sense that things have stabilized and that we can start getting back to where we were before this terrible storm.

But here's the thing. I ran for office not just to get back to the status quo; I ran for office—I ran for this office because we had not tended to a set of challenges that had been building up for decades. And that's why even as we were trying to right the ship and yank ourselves out of a potential depression, we did not take our eye off the commitments that I had made to you when I ran for office.

And that's why we fulfilled pledges to end "don't ask, don't tell," or to sign the Lilly Ledbetter act that ensures equal pay for equal work. That's why we followed through on commitments to invest in clean energy and doubled fuel efficiency standards on cars and trucks in an unprecedented fashion.

That's why we followed through on the commitment I made to make sure that people don't go bankrupt when they get sick and passed the Affordable Care Act. And already, you've got 2.5 million young people who have health insurance because of it. And already, everybody here who has insurance has protections that are more robust than the patient's bill of rights that had been debated in the 1990s and that had never gotten done. And seniors are benefiting from lower prescription drugs because of it. And small businesses are getting subsidies so that they can provide health insurance to their workers.

That's why we followed through and ended the war in Iraq. That's why we followed through and targeted Al Qaida. That's why, with Usama bin Laden gone and Al Qaida weakened, we've been able to start ramping down our involvement in Afghanistan and provide transition so that Afghans can take control of their own country. That's why we ended torture and we put our fight against terrorism on a legal footing. And that's why we worked to restore our respect around the world.

So in addition to trying to stabilize the economy, we've tried to deal with issues like energy and health care and education, where we've made more strides in terms of reforming the system than probably the previous 30 years just in the last 3, making sure that college is more affordable. We've been focused on those things because those are the foundations for long-term growth, long-term sustainable growth that is inclusive, that says everybody gets a fair shot and everybody does their fair share and everybody plays by the same set of rules.

Now, in some ways, this election, then, becomes more important than 2008, not only to preserve the gains that had been made, but also to finish the task that we set ourselves—that we set for ourselves in 2008. Because we still have more work to do. We still have too many folks who are unemployed, which means that we've got to make sure that we've got a Tax Code that's incentivizing investment here in the United States, and we're enforcing our trade laws so

that there's a level playing field, and we're training our workers to make sure that they can compete in this 21st-century globalized economy.

It means that we've got to sustain the work we've done making investments in research and development so that the breakthroughs in biotech or clean energy happen here in the United States.

It means that we have to preserve the gains we've made when it comes to respecting science. But it also means that when it comes to education, we've still got kids who are dropping out, unable to read, and they can't compete in this global economy. So we're going to have to do more work there.

It means we've got to invest in infrastructure. We used to have the best roads, the best bridges, the best rail lines. We don't anymore. And now is the time to rebuild America.

We still have to do more when it comes to energy, because as much progress as we've made over the last few years, the fact of the matter is, is that we still are importing too much oil and our economy is still subject to the whims of what happens in the Middle East. And our environment is still captive to our addiction to fossil fuels.

We've still got to reform an immigration system that's broken, because I believe we're a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants, and we can reconcile those two values, make this country stronger, because we continue to be a magnet for incredible talent from all around the world.

So the task before us still looms large. And the other side doesn't have answers to these questions. You don't see them debating how we improve our education system. You don't see them engaging in any serious way about how we're going to retrain our workers. There's not a conversation about how we restore manufacturing in this country.

They've got one message and that is, we're going to make sure that we cut people's taxes even more, so that by every objective measure our deficit is worse. And we will slash Government investments that have made this country great, not because it's going to balance the budget, but because it's driven by our ideological vision about how Government should be. That's their agenda, pure and simple.

And so we probably have not seen an election where the contrast is that sharp between the two parties as in this election. Keep in mind, when I ran in 2008, we had a Republican candidate who believed in climate change—[laughter]—who had worked on immigration reform, who had not ruled out the possibility that the wealthy might pay a little bit more as part of an overall package to reduce our deficit. But that's not what we have right now.

So there's a lot at stake. But the good news is, as I travel around the country, part of what sustained me each and every day—people sometimes ask, boy, you're working pretty long hours, and people are calling you pretty nasty names, and how do you put up with all that? And I tell them, in addition to having this remarkable family and having a rule of not watching television—[laughter]—what also sustains me is just the American people. When you go out there and you meet them, they're resilient. They're tough. They've got good sense. They have strong values.

And although this is a big, messy democracy and politics has always been contentious in this country, my confidence in the American people is undiminished. And my energy, my absolute certainty that we can be doing better and that if we follow the course that America is

going to be in a stronger position today than it was 4 years ago, that determination is as strong as ever.

If you are just as determined and you're willing to work just as hard as we did 4 years ago, then we're going to win. And more importantly, we're going to make sure that this country is everything that it deserves to be.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:04 p.m. at the Portland Museum of Art. In his remarks, he referred to Karen Harris, cochair, Obama for ME Finance Steering Committee, and her husband Robert G. Gips; Bonnie Porta, cochair, Obama for ME Finance Steering Committee, and her husband Robert C.S. "Bobby" Monks; former Sen. George J. Mitchell, Jr.; and 2008 Republican Presidential candidate Sen. John S. McCain. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Obama Victory Fund 2012 fundraisers :: Portland, ME.

Locations: Portland, ME.

Names: Baldacci, John E.; Gips, Robert G.; Harris, Karen; McCain, John D/; Michaud, Michael H.; Mills, Karen G.; Mitchell, George J.; Monks, Robert C.S. "Bobby"; Obama, Michelle; Pingree, Chellie; Porta, Bonnie.

Subjects: Maine: Democratic Party event; Afghanistan : Afghan military and security forces; Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : "Don't ask, don't tell" policy repeal; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Improvement; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Strengthening efforts; Business and industry : Credit freeze situation; Business and industry : Domestic investment, promotion efforts; Business and industry : Manufacturing industry :: Improvement; Civil rights : Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009; Commerce, international : Free and fair trade; Economy, national : Credit markets, stabilization efforts; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Postsecondary education :: Career training and continuing education; Elections : 2012 Presidential and congressional elections; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment rate; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: Promotion efforts; Energy : Foreign sources; Energy : Fuel efficiency standards, strengthening efforts; Environment : Carbon emissions; Health and medical care : Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act; Housing : Housing market :: Decline; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Maine : President's visit; Science and technology : Research and development; Small Business Administration : Administrator; Terrorism : Al Qaida terrorist group; Terrorism : Terrorists :: Torture of terrorism suspects, prohibition; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts.

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