

Remarks at an Obama Victory Fund 2012 Fundraiser

April 27, 2012

Hello, everybody. Thank you. How's everybody doing? Good. Good afternoon. I want to thank my point guard Barbara for that wonderful introduction and for all the battles you have waged on behalf of America's women and America's families. And I want to thank all of you for being here today, for all the time and energy that you've been giving to our campaign. Everybody, feel free to sit. Just relax. I've got a few things to say. *[Laughter]*

It is always a pleasure to be surrounded by so many talented, accomplished women. It makes me feel right at home. *[Laughter]* Although, at least here I get a microphone—*[laughter]*—which levels the playing field a little bit. Bo and I, we try at dinner to try to get a word in.

Now, whether you have joined this cause in its earliest days or in recent months, I know you didn't join it just because of me. You did it because of the vision that we share for this country. It's not a vision of a country where a shrinking number of people do really well while a growing number barely get by. It's a vision for an America where everybody who works hard has the chance to get ahead, where everybody has a fair shot and everybody is doing their fair share and everybody plays by the same set of rules. That's the America we know and love. That's the America within our reach.

And right now no issue is more important than restoring economic security for all of our families. Today, our economy is recovering, but not yet recovered, from the worst crisis since the Great Depression. Our businesses have added more than 4 million jobs over the past 2 years. But too many Americans are still looking for a job that pays enough to cover the bills or the mortgage. Too many families are still searching for the middle class security that started slipping away years before the recession hit.

So we've got a lot of work to do. We've got to finish what we started. And I'm so grateful to have all of you in the Women's Leadership Forum on our team.

It's fair to say that there's been a bit of talk about women and women's issues so far this year. And I've said before, I want to repeat, I think it's been oversimplified. Women are not an interest group. Women shouldn't be treated that way. Women are half this country and half of its workforce. You're 80 percent of my household, if you count my mother-in-law, and I always count my mother-in-law. *[Laughter]*

So I've got a vested interest in making sure women do well. And I'm proud of what we've done on behalf of women across this country. I know you've heard a lot about that today. But I want you to know why we've done what we've done because there are values behind the policies.

And it begins, for me at least, with the women that have shaped my life. As some of you know, I grew up the son of a single mom who struggled to put herself through school and make ends meet, even relying on food stamps at one point to help us get by. But she earned her education, earned her Ph.D., started traveling around the world, helping women enter into the economy and make a little bit of money and gain a little bit of independence.

Through scholarships and hard work, she had the opportunity to give back. And she made sure that my sister and I were able to have those same opportunities. She used to wake me up before dawn to study, because we were living overseas for a time and she wanted to make sure I stayed up with my American schooling. I'd complain, and she'd let loose with "this is no picnic for me either, buster." [Laughter] Because she had to go to work after she taught me lessons, and that's part of the reason why my sister Maya chose to become a teacher, seeing that example.

And when my mom needed help with us, my grandparents stepped up. And my grandmother, in particular, who had a high school education, worked during World War II on a bomber assembly line like Rosie the Riveter. And she didn't get a GI bill—unlike today's post-9/11 GI bill, it couldn't be transferred to family members—so she got jobs, and eventually, she got a job at a local bank.

And she worked hard and eventually made vice president, starting off as a secretary. And I'm convinced she could have been the best president that bank had ever seen, if she had gotten that chance. But she hit the glass ceiling like too many women in that generation did, and for the rest of her career, she'd watch men that she had once trained pass her by up that ladder. I think about her.

And then there's Michelle. Earlier this week, I visited a few colleges across the country as part of a battle to keep student loan rates from going up. And I spent some time on our own story, about how when Michelle and I got married, we both had loads of student debt from college and law school. So when we teamed up together, we got poorer together. [Laughter]

We only finished paying off those loans about 8 years ago. And I bring this up because what I really want to point out is that every time I mentioned Michelle, the students cheered more loudly than they did for me. [Laughter] This is what happens.

But once Michelle and I had our girls, we gave it our all to balance raising a family and chasing a career. And it was tough on me, but let's face it, it was tougher on her. I was gone a lot. I know that when she was with the girls, she'd feel guilty that she wasn't giving enough time to work. And when she was at work, she'd feel guilty about not having enough time for the girls. And like many of you, I'm sure we both wished there was—there were a machine that would let us be in two places at once.

And then today, I think about these issues as a father, because the highlight of every day for me is asking my daughters about theirs. Their hopes and their futures, that's what drives me every single day when I step into the White House. Every decision I make is all about ensuring that all of our daughters and all of our sons grow up in a country that gives them the equal chance to be anything they set their minds to, a country where more doors are open to them than were open to us.

Those stories are what inform my work. Those women are what inspire me to do what I do. That's at the heart of everything that we've done. That's the lens through which I view all of this. And that's what we mean when we say that these issues are more than just a matter of policy, they're personal. They're not just women's issues, they're economic issues. They're family issues. They're America's issues. They impact all of us.

When women make less than men for the same work, that hurts families who have to get by with less and businesses who have fewer customers who can spend money there. When a job doesn't offer family leave to care for a new baby or sick leave to care for an ailing parent, that burdens all of us. It's not just a women's issue. When an insurance plan denies women

coverage because of a preexisting condition, that puts a strain on emergency rooms and drives up the cost of care for everybody; it strains family budgets across America. When any of our citizens can't fulfill their potential because of factors that had nothing to do with talent or character or work ethic, that diminishes us as a country. It says something about who we are as Americans.

So when we started off with this administration, we were under no illusions that changing these things would be easy. We knew it wouldn't come quickly. But think about what's happened in 3 years, in large part because of you and the support that you've provided. We've started to see what change looks like.

It's been mentioned: Change is the first bill I signed into law, a law that says women deserve an equal day's pay for an equal day's work. A law that says our daughters should have the same opportunities as our sons. A law named for a courageous woman, Lilly Ledbetter, my dear friend, who is right here today. That's what change is, and it happened because of you.

Change is extending more than 16,000 new loans to women-owned businesses, cutting small-business taxes more than 18—17 times so that more women have the power to create new jobs and opportunity.

Change is education reform that does more to encourage young women to join fields like science and technology and engineering and math and increasing grants that have helped about 2.3 million more young women afford to go to college.

And yes, Barbara is absolutely right. Change is the health care reform we passed after a century of trying that finally gives women more power to make their own choices about their health care.

Last year, more than 20 million women received expanded access to preventive services like mammograms and cervical cancer screening at no additional cost. Nearly 2 million women enrolled in Medicare received a 50 percent discount on the medicine that they needed. Over 1 million more young women are insured because they can now stay on their parent's plan.

Soon, insurance companies will no longer be able to deny coverage based on preexisting conditions like breast cancer or charge women more just because they're women. And this year, women will receive new access to recommended preventive care like domestic violence screening and contraception at no additional cost. That's going to be happening.

This contraception fight in particular was illuminating. It was like being in a time machine. [Laughter] Republicans in Congress were going so far as to say an employer should be able to have a say in the health care decisions of its female employees. And I'm always puzzled by this. This is a party that says it prides itself on being rabidly antiregulation. These are folks who claim to believe in freedom from government interference and meddling. But it doesn't seem to bother them when it comes to women's health.

Now we've got Governors and legislatures across the river in Virginia, up the road in Pennsylvania, all across the country, saying that women can't be trusted to make your own decisions. They're pushing and passing bills forcing women to get ultrasounds, even if they don't want one. If you don't like it, the Governor of Pennsylvania said you can "close your eyes." It's a quote.

It's appalling. It's offensive. It's out of touch. And when it comes to what's going on out there, you're not going to close your eyes. Women across America aren't closing their eyes. As long as I'm President, I won't either. The days of male politicians controlling the health care

decisions of our wives and our mothers and our daughters and our sisters that needs to come to an end.

And none of these fights have been easy. We've got to wage more fights and win them on these issues and many more. We've got more jobs to create, more students to educate, more clean energy to generate, more troops to bring home, more doors of opportunity to open for all our kids. The one thing we can't do—the one thing we can't afford to do right now is to go back to the very same policies that got us into this mess.

Of course, that's exactly what the other side has planned. And they make no secret about it. They want to go back to the days when Wall Street played by its own rules. They want to go back to the days when insurance companies could deny coverage or jack up premiums without a reason. A lot of them seem like they want to turn back the clock to the fifties or the forties or the thirties or maybe further back than that and close doors of opportunity that we thought we'd kicked open a long time ago, doors of opportunity to people who haven't made it quite yet.

Just look at some of the debates that we've already had this year. Instead of putting forward serious plans to help more Americans back to work, a lot of those folks in the other party have chosen to refight battles we settled long ago.

And I've heard some of them say, look, this is all just a big misunderstanding; they need to get their message out better when it comes to women. I don't think that's the problem. I think they're getting their message out just fine. We don't need to read between the lines in terms of what they're saying.

When folks talk about killing the health care reform that we passed, part of what they're saying is, is that women should pay more than men for the same health care coverage. They're saying we should stop protecting women with preexisting conditions. They're saying we should no longer let that 25-year-old daughter and more than a million other young women stay on their parents' health care plans.

When you talk about how marvelous your party's economic plan is, when you break down the numbers, what you're really saying is you want to pass massive new tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires, pay for them by gutting programs that, among other things, support low-income women and children and pregnant mothers and student aid for—that disproportionately helps young women.

When you say we should get rid of Planned Parenthood, you're not just talking about restricting a woman's ability to make her own health care decisions, you're talking about denying the preventive care like cancer screenings that millions of women rely on.

And when something like the Violence Against Women Act is actually up for debate, then we know something has gone haywire. That's something that should be beyond politics. This is a bill that my Vice President coauthored when he was in the Senate. It's a bill that once passed by wide bipartisan margins. And it is a bill that we are going to renew. It is the right thing to do.

So the choice between going backward and moving forward has never been so clear. And as long as I'm President, we're going to keep moving forward. You can count on that. You don't have to take my word for it; you've got my signature on it. Because something like standing up for equal pay for equal work isn't something I've got to "get back to you on," it's the first law that I signed.

Progress is hard. Change can be slow. Opportunity, equality of opportunity, they don't come without a fight. And sometimes you got to fight to keep what you got.

But we know these things are possible. We know that because for the first time in history, young girls across the country can see three women sitting on the bench of the highest court in the land.

We know change is possible because they can read about the incredible leadership of a woman who went by the title Madam Speaker. They can turn on the news and see that one of the most formidable Presidential candidates ever is now doing as much as anyone to improve America's standing abroad as one of the best Secretary of States we've ever known.

These things are possible because earlier generations of Americans did their part to open up new doors of opportunity. And now it's our turn to open up these doors even wider. And what I want to say to all of you is if you're willing to keep pushing through all those obstacles with me, if you're willing to keep reaching for that vision of America that you hold in your hearts—that we hold in our hearts—change will come.

If you're willing to work even harder in this election than in the last one, I promise you we'll finish what we started in 2008. If you're willing to stick with me and fight with me and press on with me, I promise you we will remind everybody just why it is that America is still the greatest nation on Earth.

Thank you. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:12 p.m. at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Sen. Barbara A. Mikulski; Lilly Ledbetter, former employee, Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company plant in Gadsden, AL; Gov. Thomas W. Corbett, Jr., of Pennsylvania; and Rep. Nancy Pelosi. He also referred to his mother-in-law Marian Robinson and sister Maya Soetoro-Ng.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Obama Victory Fund 2012 fundraisers :: Washington, DC.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Clinton, Hillary Rodham; Corbett, Thomas W., Jr.; Ginsberg, Ruth Bader; Kagan, Elena; Ledbetter, Lilly; Mikulski, Barbara A.; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Pelosi, Nancy; Robinson, Marian; Soetoro-Ng, Maya; Sotomayor, Sonia M.

Subjects: Business and industry : Small businesses :: Promotion efforts; Business and industry : Women-owned businesses; Civil rights : Wage equality; Civil rights : Women's rights and gender equality; District of Columbia : Democratic Party events; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Improvement; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Education : Science and math programs; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Health and medical care : Contraception and family planning; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Health and medical care : Seniors, prescription drug benefits; Pennsylvania : Governor; State, Department of : Secretary; Taxation : Tax relief; White House Office : Vice President.

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