

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks at a Campaign Rally in Reno, Nevada

August 21, 2012

The President. Hello, Reno! Hello, hello! It is good to be back in Nevada!

Well, listen, first of all, can everybody give Alejandra a huge round of applause? She did a great job. We're very proud of her. She was outstanding.

I also want to acknowledge a dear friend, a great friend of working people not just here in Nevada, but all across the country, your Senator, Harry Reid, is in the house. Where is Harry? There he is.

It's good to see all of you. And let me just point out, every time I come here the weather is really good. I mean, you guys have a pretty good deal here. It is beautiful. And as we were flying in, we flew over Tahoe, which I'd like to pretend that there's a big campaign event there—[*laughter*]*—*but I can't really pretend that that's the case.

But it is wonderful to be in this State. It is great to be at Truckee Meadows Community College. And I came here today to talk about what students are doing here every single day. Your education is the single most important investment you can make in your future. That's true for Alejandra; it is true for every single student here. It's true whether you are talking about a community college or whether you're talking about a 4-year college or university.

And I'm proud of all of you who are doing what it takes to make that investment, not just the money, but also the long hours in the library—at least I hope you're spending some long hours in the library—[*laughter*]*—*and in the lab and in the classroom. Because it's never been more important.

But the degree students earn from this college is the surest path you will have to a good job and to higher earnings. It's the best tool that you've got to achieve that basic American promise: that simple idea that if you work hard in this country, you will be rewarded. The basic bargain that says if you work hard, if you're willing to put in the effort, then you can do well enough to raise a family, you can own your home, you can put a little away for retirement, you won't have to worry about being bankrupt if you get sick, maybe you can take a vacation once in a while. And most importantly, you know that you'll be able to pass on to your kids more opportunity and the possibility that they can do things that you couldn't even dream of.

That's what America is all about: making sure those doors of opportunity are open to everybody. That's the reason I ran for President. That's what my Presidency has been about. That's why I'm running for a second term as President of the United States.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Now, here is the thing though: Your education is not just important to you, it's important to America's success. When we invest in your future, we're investing in America's future. The fact is that countries that out-educate us today, they'll out-compete us tomorrow. We cannot afford to lose that race to make sure we've got the most highly educated, most skilled workforce in the world. And when companies and businesses are looking to locate, that's what they're looking for. And I don't want them looking any farther than Reno, Nevada, the State of Nevada, the United States of America. We've got the best workers in the world, and I want to keep it that way.

And your education is just getting more important. I'm not telling you anything you don't know. More than half of the new jobs over the next decade will require some form of higher education. And I don't think it's also any news to you that higher education is getting harder and harder to afford. It is tough for a lot of folks.

Over the past couple of decades, over the last 20 years, tuition and fees at America's colleges and universities have more than doubled. The average student who borrows to pay for college now graduates with about \$26,000 in student loan debt. And living with that kind of debt means you've got to make tough choices, especially when you're first starting out. It may mean putting off starting a family or buying a home. It may mean you don't have enough savings to try to start that new business idea that you've got.

When a big chunk of each paycheck goes just towards servicing your loan debt, that's not just tough for middle class families that are trying to make it, it's also not good for the economy, because it means you're not spending that money with local businesses.

And I want you to understand I speak from experience here. Michelle and I know about this firsthand. We didn't come from wealthy families. My mom was a single mom. Michelle's dad was a blue-collar worker. Her mom was a secretary. Michelle's parents never went to college. Both of us graduated from college and law school with a mountain of debt. So when we got married, we pooled our liabilities, not our assets. *[Laughter]* We got poorer, not richer. In fact, we paid more for our student loans than we paid on our mortgage each month, when we finally were able to afford to buy a condo. And then, once we had Malia and Sasha, now we're supposed to be saving for their college education, but we're still paying off for our college educations.

And look, we were luckier than most. We had landed good jobs with steady incomes. Even with that, though, we only finished paying off our student loans about 8 years ago. Now, think about that. I became President 3½ years ago. I was a U.S. Senator about 7 years ago. So I had been working and Michelle had been working for over a decade before we got all our loans paid off.

But here's the thing: I'm only standing here before you today because of the chance that that education gave me. So I think I can speak with some experience and say, making higher education more affordable for young people is something I've got a personal stake in. It's not something I believe in abstractly. It's something Michelle has a personal stake in. We believe in it because we've been in your shoes. We know what it's like. We understand that unless you provide those rungs on the ladder of opportunity, then young people—many of whom are more talented than Michelle and I—may not get a shot.

And that's why I've made this one of the top priorities of my presidency. It's part of what's at stake in this election. When all of you walk in to that voting booth in November, you're going to have a choice. And part of it is the choice of how we treat education in this country. And I say this because putting a college education within reach for working families does not seem to be a priority that my opponent shares.

Look, a few months ago, Governor Romney told a crowd of young people, just like you, that if you want to be successful, if you want to go to college or you want to start a business, then you can just—and I'm quoting here—"borrow money if you have to from your parents."

Audience members. Boo!

The President. Harry, did your parents have a whole bunch of money to lend you?

Audience members. No!

The President. My parents didn't have a lot of money to lend me. I'll bet a bunch of your parents don't have a lot of money to lend. It's not because they don't want to; they don't have it.

When a high school student asked Governor Romney what he would do to make college more affordable for families, Governor Romney didn't say anything about grants or loan programs that have helped millions of students earn a college education. He didn't say anything about work-study programs or rising college tuition. He did not say a single word about community colleges or how important higher education is to America's economic future. Here's what he said: "The best thing I can do for you is to tell you to shop around"—*[laughter]*—to shop around.

So this is his plan. That's his answer to a young person hoping to go to college: shop around and borrow money from your parents if you have to.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. Now, that's not an answer. That's not an—not only is it not a good answer, it's not even an answer. There is nothing a parent wants to do more than to give their kids opportunities that we never had. There are very few things more painful than a parent not being able to do it.

But we're still fighting back from the worst economic crisis in our lifetimes. There are a lot of parents out there who are working really hard, but still struggling to make ends meet. And I do not accept the notion that we should deny their children the opportunity of a higher education and a brighter future just because their families were hard hit by a recession.

Think about all the discoveries, all the businesses, all the breakthroughs that we wouldn't have had if we had told every American that wanted to go to college, "tough luck, too bad, you're on your own."

Audience member. Shop around!

The President. Shop around. This country has always made a commitment to put a good education within the reach of all who are willing to work for it. That's part of what made us an economic superpower. That's what kept us at the forefront of business and science and technology and medicine.

And this is not just a new commitment we've made. My grandfather had the chance to go to college because after fighting on behalf of America in World War II, he came back to a country that decided, you know what, we're going to make sure every veteran should be able to afford college.

My mother was able to raise me and my sister by herself and go to college because she was able to get grants and work her way through school. Michelle and I would not be here without the help of scholarships and student loans. We are only here because the chance our education gave us, and I want every young person to have that chance.

And listen, government can't help folks who won't help themselves. Parents have to parent, and young people have to stay disciplined and focused. But if you're willing to work hard, a college education in the 21st century should be available to everybody, not just the wealthy few. That's what I believe. Whether it's a 4-year education, a 2-year program, higher

education is not a luxury, it is a necessity. And every American family should be able to afford it.

That's what's at stake in this election. It's one of the reasons I'm running for President.

Since—and listen, I want you to understand, I'm not just talking the talk. I'm not just making promises. Since I took office, we've helped over 3 million more students afford a college education with grants that go farther than they did before. Now, unfortunately, the economic plan of Governor Romney could cut our investments in education by about 20 percent. So the grants that we've used—that Alejandra may be taking advantage of, many of you may be taking advantage of—those grants could be cut so deeply that 1 million of the students who've been helped, would no longer get scholarships. It would cut financial aid for nearly 10 million students a year.

Now—and here's the worst part: They're not making these cuts to reduce the deficit. They're not making these cuts so they can create more jobs. They're doing it to pay for a new \$5 trillion tax cut weighted towards the wealthiest Americans.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. Does that sound like a plan for a better future for you?

Audience members. No!

The President. It's a plan that says we can't afford to help the next generation, but we can afford massive new tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires. We can't offer our young people student loans because we've got to protect corporate tax loopholes. It's a vision that says we can't help young people who are trying to make it because we've got to protect the folks who already have made it. That's not a vision we have to accept.

Governor Romney likes to talk about his time as an investor as one of the bases for his candidacy, but his economic plan makes clear he doesn't think your future is worth investing in. And I do. That's what's at stake in this election. That's the choice this November.

We are going to make sure that America once again leads the world in educating our kids and training our workers. There are business owners across the country who say they can't fill the skilled positions they have open, and you've got a million—millions of people who are out there looking for work. So I want to give 2 million more Americans the chance to go to community colleges just like this one, to learn the skills that local businesses are hiring for right now.

Community colleges like Truckee Meadows educate the backbone of our workforce. This is where young people and some not-so-young people can come and get trained as nurses and firefighters and computer programmers and folks who manufacture clean energy components. And these are the vital pathways to the middle class, and we shouldn't weaken them; we should strengthen them.

Earlier this summer, Harry Reid and I, we fought to make sure the interest rate on Federal student loans didn't go up. We won that fight. The Republican plan in Congress would have allowed those rates to double, costing more than 7 million students an extra thousand dollars a year. With the help of Harry Reid, we set up a college tax credit so that more middle class families can save up to \$10,000 on their tuition over 4 years. Governor Romney wants to repeal it.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. In 2008, I promised we would reform a student loan system that was giving tens of billions of taxpayer dollars to big banks and lobbyists instead of giving it to students. So they were taking a cut out of the student loan program even though they had no risk because the Federal Government was guaranteeing the loans, 60 billion dollars' worth. So we said, no, let's cut them out, let's give this money directly to students. We won that fight. That's what we used to double the grants for students who are in need.

My opponent is running to return the system back to way it was. He wants to go backwards to policies where banks were taking out billions of dollars out of the student loan program. He wants to go back to policies that got us into this mess in the first place. That is the choice in this election. I want to move forward; he wants to go backwards. We are not going to let him. That's what's at stake in this election.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Four years ago, I promised we'd end the war in Iraq. And we promised we'd go after Al Qaida and bin Laden. We promised to blunt the momentum of the Taliban and then start turning over security responsibilities to the Afghans so we can start bringing our troops home. We are keeping these promises because of the tremendous sacrifice of our men and women in uniform.

So today, all of our troops are out of Iraq, and we are winding down the war in Afghanistan. But we've got to make sure that we keep faith with those folks who fought for us. So we've made sure to keep the post-9/11 GI bill strong. Everybody who has served this country should have a chance to get their degree, and as long as I am Commander in Chief, this country will care for our veterans and serve them as well as they have served us. Nobody who fights for this country should have to fight for a job or fight for a college education or fight for a roof over their heads when they come home. That's part of what's at stake in this election.

Now, I have to tell you, over the course of the next 2½ months, the other side will not talk much about education, because they don't really have a plan. They won't be talking about much, but they will spend more money than we've ever seen on ads that just try to repeat the same thing over and over again: The economy is not doing as well as it should, and it's all Obama's fault. *[Laughter]* It's like going to a concert, and they just keep on playing the same song over and over again. *[Laughter]* And the reason they've got to try to just repeat that over and over again is because they know their economic plan is not popular. They know that the American people are not going to buy another \$5 trillion tax cut, most of which goes to wealthy Americans and that will be paid for by you.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. They know gutting education to pay for a massive new tax cut for millionaires and billionaires is not going to sell. So since they can't advertise their plan, they're going to bet on the fact that you get discouraged, that you get cynical, that you decide your vote doesn't matter. They're betting that each \$10 million check from some wealthy donor drowns out millions of voices. They don't see that as a problem; that's their strategy.

I'm counting on something different. I'm counting on you. See, part of what you taught me in 2008 is that when the American people join together, they can't be stopped. When we remember our parents and our grandparents and great-grandparents and all the sacrifices they made and we're reminded that this country has always risen and fallen together, when we remember that what makes us special is the idea that everybody gets a fair shot and everybody

does their fair share and everybody is playing by the same set of rules, when that's our focus, you can't be stopped.

So here's what I'm going to need from everybody: First of all, you've got no excuse not to register to vote. We've got staff and volunteers who are here. They will grab you at the door. You won't be able to escape. This young lady right here, she's ready to register some voters. And if somehow we miss you, or if you decide you want to help your friends and your neighbors and fellow students to get registered, you can do it online at gottaregister.com. Now, I want—I know this is an educated place, but "gotta" is spelled g-o-t-t-a. [Laughter] This is gottaregister.com. So you've got to—you've "gotta" not just register; you "gotta" grab some friends. You "gotta" grab some neighbors. You "gotta" take them to the polls. You "gotta" vote.

Let's prove the cynics wrong one more time. Let's show them your vote counts. Let's prove your voice is more powerful than lobbyists and special interests. Let's keep the promise of this country alive: that no matter what you look like or where you come from, you can make it if you try. We've come too far to turn back now. We've got more students to educate, more teachers to hire, more troops to bring home, more schools to rebuild, more good jobs to create, more homegrown energy to generate, more doors of opportunity to open for everybody who's willing to work hard.

And if you'll stand with me like you did in 2008, if you're willing to do some work and knock on doors and make phone calls, we will win Washoe County. We will win Nevada. We will win this election. We'll finish what we started and remind the world why the United States of America is the greatest nation on Earth.

God bless you. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:44 p.m. at Truckee Meadows Community College. In his remarks, he referred to Alejandra Hernandez Chavez, incoming freshman, University of Nevada, Reno in Reno, NV, who introduced the President; and Republican Presidential candidate former Gov. W. Mitt Romney. He also referred to his mother-in-law Marian Robinson and sister Maya Soetoro-Ng.

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Locations: Reno, NV.

Names: Hernandez Chavez, Alejandra; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Reid, Harry M.; Robinson, Marian; Romney, W. Mitt; Soetoro-Ng, Maya.

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