

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks at an Obama Victory Fund 2012 Fundraiser in New York City
September 18, 2012

The President. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Well, it is wonderful to see all of you. I'm so grateful for all your support.

Let me just begin by saying to Jay and Bey, thank you so much for your friendship. We are so grateful. Michelle and Malia and Sasha are mad at me because they are not here. *[Laughter]* That doesn't usually happen. Usually they're like, we're glad you're going—we don't need to go. But every time they get a chance to see these two they are thrilled, partly because they are just both so generous, particularly to my kids. And Malia and Sasha just love both of them.

Beyonce couldn't be a better role model for our daughters because she carries herself with such class and poise—and has so much talent. And Jay-Z now knows what my life is like. *[Laughter]* We both have daughters, and our wives are more popular than we are. *[Laughter]* So we've got a little bond there. *[Laughter]* It's hard, but it's okay. It's okay. *[Laughter]*

Forty-nine days until this election. We just came out of convention season, and we had two conventions—one in Tampa, and one in Charlotte. And I don't know that everybody here spent all their time watching conventions. I'm sure that many of you had better things to do. But you saw two very stark visions, different visions about where we need to take this country.

I think everybody recognizes that America has all the ingredients we need for success. We've got the best workers in the world. We've got the best businesses in the world. We've got the most entrepreneurial culture in the world. We've got the best universities and scientists and researchers. We've got this incredible diversity of talent and innovation and ingenuity, which makes us the envy of the world. People come here from every corner of the globe because of that central idea at the heart of America, which says no matter what you look like, no matter where you come from, no matter what your last name is, no matter who you love, here in America you can make it if you work hard, if you try. All right, that's what inspires so many people, not just in this country, but around the world.

But what we also recognize is that, that basic bargain has been eroding over the course of a decade. There are a lot of people who have been out there working really hard, and yet their paychecks haven't kept up with the costs of everything from gas to groceries to sending a kid to college. There are a lot of folks out there who take responsibility for their lives and their families and their communities and their neighborhoods, and yet it seems as if security is always a little bit out of reach.

We've seen an economy over the last decade where jobs were being shipped overseas; an economy that was loaded up with debt; an economy where there was a lot of irresponsibility on the part of folks who should have known better. And it all culminated in the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression.

And it was in that context that I was sworn into office almost 4 years ago, at a time when the banking system was melting down, at a time when—the month I was sworn in, we lost 800,000 jobs, the worst crisis since the Great Depression. And we have worked tirelessly over the last 4 years to start turning that around, and we have made progress.

So the last 30 months, we've seen the private sector create jobs every single month—4.5 million jobs altogether. We've seen manufacturing start coming back. An auto industry that was on the brink of liquidation has come roaring back, so that now GM is once again on the top of the world and Chrysler is selling more cars than they've seen in a very, very long time. We've been able to make sure that small businesses survived and got help through the Small Business Administration.

But what we tried to do was not just get back to where we were before the crisis. We tried to start addressing some of those issues that had been lingering for too long. That's what health care—in a country like ours, we shouldn't have millions of people who are at risk of going bankrupt just because somebody in their family got sick. And that's why we passed a health care reform law that will provide millions of families the kind of security they need and also make sure that we're starting to bring down health care costs, so that we can afford it.

That's the reason why we made sure that we changed our student loan system and our Pell grant system, so that young people have a chance to go to college even if they weren't born rich, that we understand if we make an investment in young people and they succeed, then all of us are going to be better off.

It's the reason why we've invested in alternative energy, to make sure that instead of just relying on foreign oil, we're starting to build windmills and solar panels and putting people back to work here all across the country—and in the process also helping our national security and doing something about climate change.

It's the reason why we ended a policy like "don't ask, don't tell" that somehow prevented outstanding people in our services to serve the country they love just because of who they love. It's the reason that we ended the war in Iraq and we're bringing the war in Afghanistan to a close.

So we've made a lot of progress, but we've got so much more work to do. And the other side, they've got a different vision. You saw it at their convention. And their basic theory is that if you give tax cuts to folks at the very top, people like us who have been incredibly blessed and fortunate and, frankly, don't need a tax cut, that somehow the country is going to be better off.

And the good thing about so many of us here—and I know, I speak for Jay and Bey—is we remember what it's like not having anything, and we know people who were just as talented as us that didn't get the same break, the same chance. We remember some of our parents or grandparents who came here as immigrants and got a little bit of help along the way to go to that school or be able to start that first business. We understand that—as Michelle said as well as anybody could—those of us who have been blessed with success and been able to walk through those doors of opportunity, we don't slam the door behind us. We prop it open. We make it easier for those who follow to succeed as well.

And by doing that, our success is that much better. It's that much more stable and more secure, because when the whole country does well, everybody does well. When the middle class does well, and when teachers and firefighters and construction workers and receptionists and waiters and the folks who are cleaning up these big office buildings in Manhattan, if they're getting a decent wage and they're able to provide their kids a good education, the whole economy booms. That's been our history. That's who we are. And that's what's at stake in this election.

Now, there are other things that are at stake—who gets seated on the Supreme Court? Are we going to allow ourselves to go back to a time when politicians in Washington are telling

women how to make health care decisions? Michelle tells me you guys are actually quite capable of making those decisions by yourself.

When it comes to issues of war and peace, my opponent says that me ending the war in Iraq was tragic. He hasn't been able to explain what his plan would be in terms of dealing with a situation like Afghanistan. And so, how we're perceived in the world and how we're able to project our power not just through our extraordinary military and what our outstanding troops do, but also through our diplomacy and our culture and our ideals and our values—the message that we're sending around the world, that is also at stake in this election.

Whether or not we continue to stay focused on ensuring that college is affordable, and making sure that our air is clean and our water is clean, the air and water that our kids play in and breathe—that's at stake in this election.

So the stakes could not be higher. And I think most of you already understand that. Otherwise you wouldn't be here tonight. And then, so the question becomes how much are we willing to fight for this in the last 7 weeks?

I think that there's a danger sometimes among Democrats, progressives, supporters of mine, to think we must be right on the issues so I'm sure the election will be fine. But that's not how elections work. Elections work because you put in the effort and the sweat and the passion and the energy to get out there and deliver a message to the American people.

Because the American people are busy and they're focused on their kids and they're focused on getting to work or finding a job. And all this politics stuff sometimes seems very distant to them. And they're being inundated by more negative ads from the other side than we've ever seen in our history. We've got people writing \$10 million checks just to see if they can beat me. And you see it, anybody who has been turning on the television—you don't see it in New York, because this isn't a swing state. [Laughter] But you try going to Ohio or Virginia right now and ad after ad is distorting my record or trying to persuade people as to why we need to change course and replace the occupant of the White House.

So we can't be complacent. If all of you genuinely believe that the decisions that I've made and the vision that I'm projecting about the kind of America we want not just for ourselves, but for our kids and our grandkids—if you genuinely believe that, we're going to have to work for it. The other side is full of passion and they are working very hard to beat us. And in these next 7 weeks we're going to have to do everything that we can.

And for some of you that means financial support; for others it may mean you're out there knocking on some doors or making some phone calls, or using your influence to persuade other people to get involved.

But understand that this will not come easy, and that we're going to have to fight for this thing every step of the way. And that's always been the case. It's been interesting over the last 4 years, sometimes people ask me, how do you handle all the criticism and the media and the scrutiny and the pressure and this and that and the other. And I tell them there are two things that allow me to not just survive this but to thrive and enjoy it. The first is the American people. Because when you travel around the country, it turns out that they're so much better than the kind of politics we see in Washington.

Most people are good, and they're decent, and they're trying to do the right thing. And they may not follow every issue and know exactly what is going on, but their basic instinct is let's give everybody a fair shot and let's make sure everybody does their fair share, and let's

make sure everybody is playing by the same set of rules. And let's open up opportunity for everybody. That's—you go to a small town in Iowa, you go to a big city in California—that decency and goodness of the American people shines through. And that encourages me. That makes me feel good.

Some of you saw—I was just on Letterman before I came here, and some of you saw that he showed that picture of that pizza owner who picked me up—[laughter]—and lifted me up and kind of straightened out my back—[laughter]—well, this guy, he started his own pizza company and is a Republican, but is somebody who thought that I shared with him a passion for doing the right thing. And he started his own blood drive in the community that is now the largest blood drive in Florida, and is passionate about helping folks who haven't had a chance, and wants to make sure that they succeed.

And so when I hear people trying to label folks as, well, these are Republicans, or these are Democrats, or these are people who don't understand the country—when I hear those divisions, I say, well, you're not paying attention to what's going on in the country. There's a lot of good out there.

So that keeps me energized and inspired. And the second thing is an awareness of history and an understanding that change in this country has never been easy. It's never been easy. Women getting the right to vote took decades of work. The civil rights movement—we had a century of work. The union movement, people having an opportunity to get a minimum wage—people were beaten and died for that.

So I'm always reminded and humbled by the fact that what we do at any given moment is just part of this bigger pattern, part of God's plan, part of a process. And our job is just to make sure that we are pushing in the right direction—pushing the wheel of history in the right direction. And hopefully, then our kids will be equipped and have the privilege to keep pushing in the right direction in the future.

So I don't want people to be complacent, but I also don't want people to be discouraged. We're on the brink of an election, but more importantly, we're on the brink of moving America in a direction in which we're going to be more just, more fair, the economy is going to grow in a way that includes everybody—an America that's respected around the world because we are putting forward our best values and our best ideals.

And you're a part of that. Being here tonight, you're a part of that. You're a part of us trying to make some more history. And we've made history in the past; we're going to make some more history over the next seven weeks as long as you guys are ready to keep going with me. All right?

So thank you so much, everybody. God bless you. Appreciate you. Bey, Jay, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:48 p.m. at the 40/40 Club. In his remarks, he referred to entertainers Beyonce G. Knowles, and Shawn C. "Jay-Z" Carter; Republican Presidential nominee W. Mitt Romney; David Letterman, host, CBS's "Late Show with David Letterman"; and Scott Van Duzer, owner, Big Apple Pizza. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, repeal; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Strengthening efforts; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Improvement; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: Promotion efforts; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; New York : Democratic Party event; New York : President's visits.

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