

Administration of Barack Obama, 2013

Remarks at a Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Fundraiser in Palo Alto, California

June 6, 2013

Thank you, everybody! It is good to be back in California, especially when the weather is this good. *[Laughter]* And obviously, I want to first of all thank Mike and Marci and their two beautiful daughters and mom and uncles and aunt—*[laughter]*—and everybody who helped to participate.

And I also want to just acknowledge somebody who I think is one of the finest public servants we've got in Washington and was somebody who worked in the private sector, then took on an incredible job of running the public schools in Denver, helped to turn them around, is now representing the great State of Colorado and is a great friend: Michael Bennet. So give Michael a big round of applause.

Somebody was asking where I was earlier today and asking whether I got to sleep in between, and the answer is no, because, unfortunately, Air Force One is pretty loaded up. You can make phone calls, you can read e-mails, you can look at computers, so you don't rest on plane trips.

But earlier this morning, I had a chance to visit a school in Mooresville, North Carolina, and the reason we were there is because they've undergone this amazing transformation. Several years ago, their superintendent made a decision that he was just going to get rid of textbooks. They were hugely expensive. Oftentimes, they were on a 7-year cycle so that kids were looking and there was still a map of the Soviet Union in there in their social studies class. *[Laughter]* And he made this radical decision that he was going to replace every textbook with a laptop for every student in the school, starting in third grade. And as a consequence of not just the technology, but training teachers to think entirely differently about curriculum and teaching, what they've done is, despite the fact that they—out of 115 districts, I think it is—they are 110th in spending per district, they now rank number 2 in performance.

The kids are unbelievably enthusiastic. And they showed me a whole range of things. One group of math students had started a business on their laptops—and this was for math class—and they were calculating their profits and their break-even point and when they go from red to black. It was an M&Ms machine, not surprisingly. *[Laughter]*

Another group of kids were dissecting the Inaugural Address that had been done in my first—or the Inaugural poem that had been delivered at my first Inauguration by Elizabeth Alexander, but they were able to do it on the screen, make notes on the screen that were automatically transmitted onto all the laptops of the school. And you could see these kids just excited about learning and wanting to keep learning well after the school day was done.

And so what we announced was our initiative that we're going to make sure, in 5 years, every school across America has the highest speed, most state-of-the-art connections so that every classroom is wired and every student can take advantage of these technologies. And one of the great things about it is in order to do this, we don't need a vote from Congress, which means that we actually, I think, will be able to get it done on time. *[Laughter]*

But I tell this story because all around the country, in places like Austin and in North Carolina and here, obviously, in California, there are incredible things going on. And we've

now gone through some of the toughest years economically that this country has ever gone through, and yet, after the worst recession since the Great Depression, we're now seeing the economy slowly regain steam. Not just the stock market, which has been hitting record highs, but housing is beginning to bounce back. We've now seen growth for 3½ years straight, jobs being created just about every month, and the auto industry come roaring back, the financial system stabilizing.

The truth of the matter is, is that because of the grit and determination of the American people, we've got all the cards we need in order to make sure that the 21st century is the American century, just like the 20th. The only thing that's holding us back is our capacity to work together around a commonsense set of solutions. Whether it's in education, whether it's on clean energy, whether it's on spurring more technology and entrepreneurship that obviously this part of the country represents and has captured the imagination of the entire world, whether we're talking about how we deal with our infrastructure, how we make sure that our fiscal policies are in line so that we're not passing on debt to the next generation, but we're also making sure that we meet our commitments to current generations when it comes to things like Social Security and Medicare, on all of these issues, there is a range of commonsense solutions available to us right now. And if we implement them, then we're going to leave an America behind for our kids that—and our grandkids—that is stronger, more prosperous, more unified, more tolerant than ever before.

And so the reason I'm here today is to deliver the good news that we've got what we need in order to succeed. Now, I've got to leaven that with a little bad news. The bad news is that too often, Washington is getting in our way of this progress. And the reason it's getting in our way is not because, as some suggest, Government has no role to play in this process; Government has always had a role to play.

I come from Illinois, the great Land of Lincoln. And in the midst of civil war, Abraham Lincoln starts the land-grant colleges, helps to create the intercontinental railroad system that links our country together, starts the National Institute of Science, understanding that there are certain investments we can only make together; that although our economy is driven by entrepreneurship and risk-taking and the private sector—the greatest engine of prosperity the world has ever known—there are some things we do better together.

And people in this area understand that as well as anybody. The incredible prosperity that is generated from Silicon Valley in part is because we collectively—or at least our parents or our grandparents—made investments in things like DARPA and basic research and science and helped to facilitate the framework that created the worldwide web and all the spinoffs that came out of that.

Oftentimes, the private sector cannot or will not make those investments because they don't automatically show a profit right away, because they may be too expensive for any single enterprise to invest in. But that's what then provides us the platform to do the incredible things that we do.

So the reason that Washington is a problem is not because Government generically is the problem, the reason Washington is a problem is right now it's broken. It's not working the way it needs to. And look, historically, I am a strong Democrat because I believe in the basic principle that everybody should have a chance. Everybody should have opportunity; it doesn't matter where they're born, what their last name is, what circumstances they started in, who they love. I want everybody to have a fair shot. But I'm the first one to admit Democrats don't have a monopoly on wisdom. I will say, though, right now—[laughter]—when it comes to doing

the things that need to get done, we're just not getting a lot of cooperation from the other side. We're just not getting a lot of cooperation from the other side.

And I remain hopeful—because I've run my last campaign—that over the next 3 years, we're going to see more of the bipartisan efforts that we're seeing in some areas. For example, Michael Bennet is doing a great job working with the so-called Gang of Eight to finally get immigration reform done so that we're a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants and we are fixing a broken immigration system. So there are areas where we're starting to see glimmers of functionality in Washington.

But on too many area, we're not getting the kind of cooperation that we need, not because the Democrats are particularly ideological or left wing right now. The truth of the matter is, Michael and I—I know that there are a few Republicans here in the audience—if you talk to us, it turns out we're pretty commonsense folks. We don't think Government can do everything. We don't think that top-down solutions are the right way to go. We believe in the free market. We believe in a light touch when it comes to regulations. We don't want to tax all businesses out of business. But we do think that there's a role to play for Government.

When it comes to, for example, making sure that every child in America has early childhood education so they're getting a healthy start and by the time they hit school they're prepared to learn, that's an investment we can make.

When it comes to making sure a nation this wealthy provides affordable, accessible health care for every American, that's something we can do. There's no other advanced nation on Earth where 10, 15 percent of the population doesn't have health care. None. Well, why should we be any different as the greatest nation on Earth? And Government has a role to play to make that happen.

We have to make sure that we keep our edge when it comes to research and development. This so-called sequester that has stayed in place—in part because of the stubbornness of the other side in negotiating a sensible budget framework—is freezing up research precisely at a time when it's never been more important. And you got brilliant young people all across the country, including in this area, who may not have the capacity to go into their chosen fields because the research grants have dried up. We have a role to play.

When it comes to what I think will be one of the most important decisions that we make as a nation—this generation makes—the issue of climate change, we're not going to be able to make those changes solely through a bunch of individual decisions that are made. We're going to have to make some collective decisions about how much do we care about this when the science is irrefutable. And that means Government is going to have a role to play in helping to organize clean energy research and making sure that we're taking into account the pollution that we're sending into the air and that we're encouraging new ways of delivering energy and using it more efficiently. We're going to have a role to play.

And obviously, our Government is going to have a role to play internationally, whether it's in making sure that we're keeping the American people safe or trying to make sure that we're delivering prosperity and hope to the parts of the world where people, religious minorities, young girls still don't have opportunity. Those are all things that we have to do together.

So here's the bottom line: I have never been more optimistic about America than I am right now. People sometimes ask me this. They notice my gray hair, and they say, boy—*[laughter]*—you've got a really hard job, and how do you put up with all the stuff that's going on all the time and everything that's said about you and this and that and the other? And I try

to remind folks that in so many ways, this is the greatest time in human history. For all the tragedies that we witness, for all the terrible things that we read about, for all the millions of people here in America who are still locked out of opportunity and the struggles that middle class families are going through every single day, all the people who are still unemployed, folks whose houses are still underwater, the fact of the matter is, is that we're more inclusive, we're more prosperous, we are less violent now than just about any time in human history. And that should give us hope.

And when we see these beautiful kids running around, I suspect they will further improve on our—on this project. But we've got to get this right. And the only way I'm going to be able to do that is if I've got people in Congress who share my optimism and share a sense that there are practical solutions out there and that compromise is not a dirty word. That's the kind of senator that Michael Bennet represents, and that's what we're going to need in the United States Senate. And I haven't even started talking about things like judicial nominations, which obviously are contingent on us maintaining a strong Democratic majority in the United States Senate.

So I would just ask all of you, number one, to be optimistic. Number two, I'd ask you all to stay engaged. Number three, I'd ask you to really focus on what you can do in order to ensure that the very best people who care deeply about this country, but also have a practical bent: how do we get those folks in the Senate, staying in the Senate, working cooperatively. Because ultimately, our Government represents us, and if we neglect it, then it doesn't work. And when we're engaged, it works.

You showed that in 2008; that's how I got elected. You showed that in 2012; that's how I got reelected. I need you to show that one more time to make sure that we have a Democratic Senate, and having a Democratic House wouldn't be bad either. [*Laughter*]

So thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:39 p.m. at the residence of Mike and Marci McCue. In his remarks, he referred to Sen. Michael F. Bennet, in his capacity as chair of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee; Lily and Katie McCue, daughters of Mr. and Mrs. McCue; Lucy McCue Allan, mother of Mr. McCue; Mark A. Edwards, superintendent, Mooresville Graded School District in Mooresville, NC; and Sens. Marco A. Rubio, Jeffrey L. Flake, John S. McCain III, Lindsey O. Graham, Richard J. Durbin, Robert Menendez, and Charles E. Schumer. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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Locations: Palo Alto, CA.

Names: Alexander, Elizabeth; Bennet Michael F.; Bennet, Michael F.; Durbin, Richard J.; Edwards, Mark A.; Flake, Jeffrey L.; Graham, Lindsey O.; McCain, John S., III; McCue Allan, Lucy; McCue, Katie; McCue, Lily; McCue, Marci; McCue, Mike; Menendez, Robert; Rubio, Marco A.; Schumer, Charles E.

Subjects: California : Democratic Party events; California : President's visits; Communications : Broadband technology; Congress : Bipartisanship; Democratic Party : Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Early childhood

education programs; Education : Teachers; Education : Technology and innovation, expansion efforts; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: Promotion efforts; Environment : Climate change; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Science and technology : Research and development.

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