

**Remarks at an Organizing for Action Dinner**

*February 25, 2014*

Well, it is good to see all of you. And I've had a chance to hug you and catch up. So now it's all business. *[Laughter]*

Let me start by thanking Jim Messina and Jon Carson and all the OFA staff for the great work that they do each and every day. I've gotten a lot of compliments from a lot of you about the quality of the OFA staff, and I actually concur that they are terrific and passionate about the work that we're doing out there.

I just had a chance to talk to some of the leaders from States and communities all across the country who are pounding the pavement and talking to their neighbors and talking to their friends. And the levels of enthusiasm and energy that they projected was inspiring, and it really reminds me of why what I do in the White House matters, because I got folks like that—out on the ground, out in communities every single day—that are counting on me to give voice to the incredible work that they're doing, but also the values that they represent.

And I want to thank all of you. As I look around the room, I would not be President if it were not for this room. And there are a lot of people here who are new friends, but there are also some folks here who supported me way back in the day when I had no gray hair and I didn't wear a tie. Somebody just showed me a picture the other day, and I looked really young. *[Laughter]*

Most of this is just going to be a conversation. I want to spend time on questions and answers and dialogue and discussion. But let me just make a couple of quick comments.

Number one, as I said at the State of the Union Address, I genuinely think this year can be a breakout year for America. We have now really consolidated the recovery. If you look at the statistics—8.5 million new jobs, unemployment rate the lowest it's been since before I was elected; you've got manufacturing coming back; we've made progress on energy, fuel efficiency, carbon emissions reductions; making steady progress in terms of reforming our education system—we're actually poised to make the 21st century the American century, just like the 20th century was.

And Alan Solomont is over here nodding his head. Alan was representing the United States and did an outstanding job in Spain. And one of the remarkable things that I think he will affirm is that everybody outside of the United States actually thinks that we're doing a remarkable job, that our economic growth is the envy of most of the developed world. And yet that's not always reflected in people's moods here in the States.

And there's a reason for that. Our growth has been uneven. Those of us at the very top have disproportionately benefited from productivity gains, technology, globalization. Middle class families, working class families, still feel like they're struggling every single day to get by. And the ladders of opportunity for folks who want to work their way into the middle class are not as robust as they used to be. And so, even in the midst of recovery, there's still a lot of anxiety out there.

And what I said in the State of the Union was that we have to be focused like a laser on building back up an opportunity society in which everybody feels like if they work hard and if

they're responsible, they can get ahead. And that means more jobs; that means making sure people are trained for the jobs that are out there. It means making sure kids get a world-class education. It means that work pays and that not only are they getting a decent paycheck that can support their families, but that they've got retirement security and health care security and all the things that give them a stable platform to live their lives and make sure their kids succeed. So we're doing that.

And I've also said that Congress may not be willing to break gridlock during a Presidential year. I'm going to look for every opportunity to work with them. But if they're not, we're just going to go ahead and do some work.

So just one example: Today at the White House, we announced two more advanced manufacturing hubs, one in Detroit and one in Chicago, where we are going to take cutting-edge research that's being done on advanced metallurgy and digital technology. And consortiums of universities and businesses are coming together to bring jobs back to the United States of America, attract investment. And we didn't have to do that with some legislation, although there is some legislation pending in Congress that could expand it.

We did the same thing to make sure Federal contractors are paying their employees \$10.10 an hour. We're doing the same thing when it comes to making sure that we've got high-speed broadband in every classroom in America. I already have a commitment that's going to mean millions of students, about 20 million students, 15,000 schools across America, are going to be wired for broadband. We're doing that in conjunction with the FCC and the private sector. And so we're just going to keep on looking for ways in which we can realize the values that we've been fighting for, for a long time.

But as all of you know because you were involved in 2008 or 2012, it doesn't work if we don't have folks on the ground who are speaking out on behalf of these issues and these values. Politics has become so toxic and information is so contested and people are separated from how they get news, that oftentimes to break through, what's necessary is the validation of a neighbor or a friend or a coworker or a family member. And that's where OFA comes in, because it's able to, in very concrete terms, help to generate people's energy and mobilize their interest around these issues in ways that are not abstract, but are very concrete and very specific and that reach people where they live, at the kitchen table, and at the water cooler at work. And that grassroots work that is done also then energizes me and informs the issues that we're going to try to lift up over the course of the next year.

So I just want to say to all of you, what you're doing is really important, and we really appreciate it. And you don't always—it's not always flashy. It's often at the ground level, but it makes a difference.

And one final example of that difference that's being made is when it comes to the Affordable Care Act. Obviously, nowhere has there been more misinformation, nowhere are just basic facts more contested. But as a consequence of some of the folks that have been doing this work on the ground, as of today, we've signed up more than 4 million people through the exchanges. That's 4 million people who have the security of health care, in many cases for the very first time. And that doesn't count the 3 million who are already able to get health insurance because they're staying on their parent's plan. That doesn't count the millions who have been able to sign up through Medicaid. And we're not done yet.

So when you've got grassroots folks who are committed and energized like they are, it makes a difference. And whatever issues you care about, whether it's climate change or

women's reproductive health or foreign policy or education or access to higher education, having folks who are willing to fight for what they believe in connected to what we do here is really powerful and important. And they couldn't do it without you.

So I just wanted to say thank you to all of you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:19 p.m. at the Mandarin Oriental Washington, DC, hotel. In his remarks, he referred to James A. Messina, national chairman, and Jon Carson, executive director, Organizing for Action; and former U.S. Ambassador to Spain Alan D. Solomont.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Organizing for Action :: Dinner.

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