

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

**Remarks at a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and
Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Dinner in Houston, Texas**
April 9, 2014

The President. Thank you. Everybody, sit down. Have a seat, have a seat. Have a seat. Thank you. Well, first of all, I just want to thank John Eddie and Sheridan for building this house just for our fundraiser here. [*Laughter*] I think it turned out just fine. I don't know what your next project is. [*Laughter*] But it is gorgeous, and we are so grateful to you for everything you've done for this community, everything you've done for the country, and all the help that you've provided to Democrats all across the country. It really means a lot. So thank you very much. Appreciate you all.

We've got some other luminaries here that I just want to make sure I recognize. First of all, your outstanding mayor, Annise Parker, is here, with her beautiful daughter. Good to see you. Somebody who is going to be Speaker of the House once again, has already gone down in history as one of the best Speakers we've ever had, Nancy Pelosi is in the house. Of course, you cannot be a good Speaker unless you've got great Members in your caucus, and we've got a couple of outstanding ones from the Houston area: Sheila Jackson Lee and Representative Al Green. And two outstanding former leaders here in Texas who continue to provide so much outstanding service to the community. First of all, former Mayor Bill White is in the house. He just wrote a book, by the way. Everybody go out and buy it. [*Laughter*] You've always got to—if somebody is an author, you've always got to plug the guy's book. [*Laughter*] It was reviewed in the New York Times. It's a serious book. And also former Governor Mark White. Where did Mark go? There he is right there.

And of course, all of you are here today, so I want to thank you for that. And whoever was in charge of the weather in Houston—usually I come down to Houston, and it's not quite this comfortable. But it's beautiful. And thanks to Eden for coming too, because she's laughing at all my jokes. [*Laughter*]

Let me say, first of all, I just came down from Fort Hood, and we were commemorating and celebrating the lives of three incredible patriots who were shot and killed during the event that happened last week there, and met with the families and had a chance to address the entire community. And I think it's useful just to remember as we wind down this war in Afghanistan how heavy a burden our men and women in uniform and their families have carried over these last 10-plus years of war and how many scars—seen and unseen—remain and how important it is for us to support these incredible patriots and incredible veterans. I know that that's something that folks focus on here in Houston, but I wanted to make sure that I made mention of that.

As a consequence, I was out of Washington, which usually is okay. It's good getting out of Washington, gives you a little perspective. While I was gone, the Republicans in the Senate chose to block a bill that seemed like common sense, I think, to most of us, which would provide the ability for us to meaningfully enforce the simple concept of equal pay for equal work; the notion that your mom, your sister, your daughters, your spouse should not be discriminated against at the workplace, and if they're doing a good job doing something, that they should get paid the same as somebody's son, husband, father.

We would—you would think that that, at this point, would not be a controversial proposition. And yet the Republicans in the Senate uniformly decided to say no. Now, we had done an Executive order yesterday facilitating Federal contractors to provide basic information—[*applause*—to make sure that if somebody shares their salary with a fellow employee, that they couldn't be retaliated against; that some data is provided—in aggregate, not in detailed ways—that make sure that people know whether or not they're treating women the way they should on the job. But obviously, the action I took through this Executive order was restricted to Federal contractors; it didn't reach every employer.

Now, apparently, a lot of these Republicans during the debate said they just think that this idea there's a gender pay gap is a fantasy, it's not real, there are all these other reasons why this happens. And in fact, I think there was a candidate for the Senate, a Republican in Michigan, who voiced the opinion that women make other choices; you know, they—and I think that's certainly true; every individual makes other choices. Very rarely do you meet people who make the choice to be paid less for doing the same job. [*Laughter*]

But I use this as just one example of the scores of issues that are critical to advancing this country's future in which not only is the other side blocking progress, but aren't even offering a persuasive alternative vision for how we're going to grow the economy and make sure that anybody who works hard in this country can get ahead. This has become the least productive Congress in modern history, recent memory. And that's by objective measures, just basic activity.

At a time when the economy is actually poised to take off, at a time where we fully—where we finally have recovered from the most crippling economic crisis since the Great Depression, at a time when the private sector has created close to 9 million new jobs and the housing market is recovering and we've got an energy boom going on in this country like we've never seen in a very long time and the dropout rate is coming down and we've just got a lot of things going for us—and yet we've still got a lot of competition from countries like China and Germany—and this can be the American century just like the 20th century was if we make some good decisions. If we're investing in early childhood education; if we're investing in rebuilding our roads and our infrastructure—because I got to tell you, driving here from the airport, it was a little bumpy. [*Laughter*] And if you think the potholes are bad here, imagine what they're like where we had one of the worst winters in recent memory.

If we invest in basic science and research; if we have a smarter Tax Code that rewards investment and rewards hard work instead of being rife with loopholes that is good business for a lot of accounting firms, but isn't producing any value in our economy; if we're training our workers for the jobs that are out there right now; if we're making our high schools more effective—if we take some of these basic steps, we are poised to own the next couple of decades. And when I travel overseas, what's fascinating is the degree to which other leaders look at us with envy: You guys have the best cards. And yet they look at Washington, and they say, why is it that things are so dysfunctional?

And that's why I'm here today to talk to you, because we have to have a Congress that works; not one that is—march in lockstep, not one that agrees with every proposal I put forward, but a Congress that is serious about governance and is thinking about the next generation and not just the next election.

You take an issue like immigration reform. Everybody agrees that it's broken. You've got law enforcement, you've got the evangelical community, you've got the business community, you've got the agricultural sector, you've got immigrants' rights advocates—across the board,

everybody says we can fix this thing. It will be good for families that are being torn apart. It will be something that adds value to our economy. It will reduce—it will actually reduce—our deficit because we're bringing people out of the shadows. We got a bipartisan vote out of the Senate, and yet we cannot even get a vote in the House of Representatives. And it's not because it doesn't make sense. It's not because there's some serious dispute or technical difference in terms of policy. It has to do with politics.

And we've got to stop that. We don't have time for it. Too much is at stake. There are too many families out here who, even though the economy is growing, are still trapped in stagnant wages and stagnant incomes and still struggling to make ends meet at the end of the month. And if we were taking some basic steps—minimum wage? Three-quarters of the country agrees we should raise the minimum wage. Now, usually, when three-quarters of the country agree on something—and that's not that often—politicians rush to get that thing done.
[Laughter]

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. Don't—I agree. Eden agrees with me. [Laughter]

Well, why are we doing it? The fact of the matter is, is that you've got a Congress right now that is solely focused on obstruction because they think it's a good political strategy. And here's my challenge to you. Here's the disconcerting thing. Obstruction may actually be a good political strategy if Democrats don't vote in the midterms. On every issue of importance, Democrats actually have the better argument, and we have majority opinion behind us. But we have this congenital disease, which is in midterm elections, we don't vote at the same rates. Our voters are younger, more unmarried women, more African American and Latino voters. They get excited about general elections; they don't get as excited about midterm elections.

And what's compounding the problem is obviously the massive amounts of money that are coming from super PACs on the other side and active efforts to discourage people from voting, which is another thing I don't understand, but apparently, is fairly active here in Texas. The idea that you'd purposely try to prevent people from voting—

Audience member. Un-American.

The President. Un-American. How is it that we're putting up with that when we don't have to? But it requires a level of organization and a level of effort that has to be coordinated and has to be executed. And that's why your presence here tonight is so important. We need you to take these midterms as seriously as any Presidential election that you've ever been involved in. It may not be as sexy, it may not get as much publicity, but it is as important to the future of our children and our grandchildren as anything else we're going to do. And you have to feel a sense of urgency about it.

Michelle promised me—or Michelle made me promise that 2012 was going to be my last campaign. This is my last campaign; this is—this counts. And I know you wouldn't be here if you didn't agree with that. So the good news is, if in fact we work hard, if we execute, I'm actually confident that we can do very, very well in this midterm election, and more importantly, by doing well, we can do well by the American people.

So thank you very much, everybody. I'll take a couple questions. Thanks.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:56 p.m. at the residence of Sheridan and John Eddie Williams, Jr.. In his remarks, he referred to former Mayor William H. White of Houston, TX; former

Gov. Mark W. White of Texas; Sfc. Daniel M. Ferguson, USA, S. Sgt. Carlos A. Lazaney-Rodriguez, USA, and Sgt. Timothy W. Owens, USA, who were killed in the April 2 shootings at Fort Hood, TX; and U.S. senatorial candidate Terry Lynn Land of Michigan. He also referred to Executive Order 13665.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee fundraisers :: Houston, TX; Addresses and Remarks : Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee fundraisers :: Houston, TX.

Locations: Houston, TX.

Names: Ferguson, Daniel M.; Green, Al; Jackson Lee, Sheila; Land, Terry Lynn; Lazaney-Rodriguez, Carlos A.; Obama, Michelle; Owens, Timothy W.; Parker, Annise D.; Pelosi, Nancy; White, Mark W.; White, William H.; Williams, John Eddie, Jr.; Williams, Sheridan.

Subjects: Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Army, Department of the : Shootings at Fort Hood, TX; Civil rights : Wage equality; Congress : House of Representatives :: Minority leader; Democratic Party : Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee; Democratic Party : Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Elections : 2014 congressional elections; Elections : Voter participation; Government organization and employees : Federal Government contracting policies, reform; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Labor issues : Minimum wage; Texas : Democratic Party events; Texas : President's visit; Texas : Shootings at Fort Hood.

DCPD Number: DCPD201400255.