

*Administration of Barack Obama, 2014*

**Remarks at a Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Dinner in New York City**

*May 14, 2014*

Thank you, everybody. Thank you. Well, first of all, to Blair and Cheryl and their kids, thank you so much for opening up this gorgeous home. And to Gary, Josh, and Jamie—just the whole crew—these folks have been with me dating back to when people couldn't pronounce my name. [*Laughter*] So they are early investors, and they've been with me through thick and thin, and I couldn't be more grateful for the incredible support and friendship that they've provided.

You've got two of the best Senators in the country in this room in Jack Reed and Michael Bennet. These are the folks you actually want in the Senate. They're serious. They work hard. They are work horses rather than show horses. They are thoughtful. They are constantly looking for ways to be bipartisan, but are rock solid when it comes to Democratic principles. And I'm proud to have served with them, and they're great friends. So we're glad they're there.

And Shaun Donovan is one of your own, used to hang out around here a little bit. And Blair is right to acknowledge that in the aftermath of Sandy, when we thought about who was somebody who we had confidence could drive a process to make sure that the Federal, State, and local coordination delivered for the people who had been affected, and that we could rebuild both on the New York side and the Jersey side as effectively as possible and as quickly as possible, Shaun came to mind and, working with Jamie and others, I think has done a terrific job. So thank you for the great job that you've done.

The country is, by most measures, doing much better than when I came into office. And that's demonstrable. We were losing 800,000 jobs a month. Now we've created 9.2 million jobs; the unemployment rate has come drastically down. Because of the recovery of the stock market and the housing market, trillions of dollars of wealth have been restored to the American people. We produce more energy than ever before, and we've been able to accomplish that while doubling clean energy and reducing our carbon emissions faster than any other industrialized country.

Our education system has seen significant improvement. We've reduced the dropout rate. Actually, the Latino dropout rate has been cut in half since 2000; college attendance never been higher. Our exports are up, our imports of oil are down, and the deficit has been cut by more than half.

So if you look at the numbers, you'd say not only are we moving in the right direction, but we've actually got better cards than most other countries around the world. And yet what we also know is, despite the momentum that Blair discussed, there's still anxiety around the country, partly because people still feel traumatized by what happened in 2007, 2008. They had a sense of how unstable their situations—how precarious their situations could be. But partly because we've seen a two-decade- to three-decade-long trend where increases in profitability, expansions of markets, increases in corporate profits, rises in the stock market don't translate into higher incomes and higher wages for the ordinary person, at the same time that their costs for sending their kids to college have skyrocketed. Their health care costs, up until—shockingly—the Affordable Care Act was passed, had been skyrocketing. And so folks feel

vulnerable. And what they're uncertain of is whether even with the improvement, the next generation is going to do as well or better than they did.

And that's the central issue of our time: Do we continue to build a middle class and generate ladders of opportunity so that anybody who works hard and is willing to take responsibility can succeed?

And the steps we've tried to take in conjunction with the Senate over the last 5 years have advanced that goal. Whether it was expanding Pell grants for disadvantaged kids or making sure that people weren't going bankrupt because they got sick or putting people back to work rebuilding our infrastructure, everything we've done, everything we've pursued has had that in mind: making sure if you work hard you can make it in this country.

And despite the progress we've made, there is so much left to do. And the challenge we've got is very simple: Washington doesn't work. It's not as if we've got no good ideas on policy. We've got tons of them. I've got a drawer full of things that we know would create jobs, help our middle class, boost incomes, make us more competitive. But we have a party on the other side that has been captured by an ideology that says no to everything because they cling to a rigid theory that the only way to grow the economy is for government to be dismantled and let the market sort things out and folks at the top doing very well will somehow automatically trickle down to everybody else.

And there might have been a time where that was an exaggeration. But now it's not. You can see it in their budgets. You can see it in their opposition to hiking the minimum wage. You can see it in their opposition to funding basic research. You can see it in their position that the only way to cut the deficit is to cut things that the most vulnerable of our population depends on. You can see it in their refusal to rebuild our infrastructure, something that never used to be partisan.

And the only reason we've been able to make some progress and gain some traction is because we've had a Senate in Democratic hands that has shown extraordinary unity, which means that we've at least been able to get our agenda out there and have a debate about the minimum wage and have a debate about increasing funding for basic research and have a debate that says, no, climate change is real, and it is both a challenge and an opportunity we can do something about.

Now, here's the good news, and I'll be happy to talk to you about the details of any one of these policies. The good news is, on every issue that you and I care about, the country is actually on our side. Immigration reform, a majority of the country agrees with us. Raise the minimum wage, a majority of the country agrees with us. Investing in basic research, check. Rebuilding our infrastructure and putting our folks back to work, agree with it. Revamping our Tax Code that we're rewarding companies that are investing here in the United States, they're with us.

There are very few issues, if any, in which the Republican position enjoys the majority public support. But we've got one problem: We have a congenital disease, which is, during midterms, our voters don't show up. That's what it comes down to. That and population distribution and gerrymandering.

I was with de Blasio, I guess, 2 days before the election. We're in Brooklyn, the streets are filled, and everybody is waving. And I go into buy some cheesecake. Some woman comes up and hugs me and kisses me and says: "Oh, my sister just got on the Affordable Care Act, and we love you. What can we do to support you?" And I said, "Move to North Dakota." [*Laughter*] If I

could just get about a million excess votes in Brooklyn—[*laughter*—out to Nebraska, Wyoming, we'd be doing okay. I don't need 80 percent of the vote here. [*Laughter*]

So we've got some structural disadvantages, but we do not vote during midterms. Our voters are younger; they're more likely to be minority; unmarried women. They're folks who can get galvanized and excited during Presidential elections, but we have a tougher time communicating with them during midterms. And that's what we have to break. We have to break that cycle.

I told Michelle in 2012 this was my last campaign. She said, "Hallelujah!" And then I had to go back to her about 6 months ago and say, "Actually, honey, let me amend that." [*Laughter*] "We've got one more campaign." Because if we are going to realize the potential that we have right now, then we've got to perform better during these midterm elections. I have to have partners in Congress. I have to have partners in Congress.

If you care about climate change, I've got to have partners in Congress. I can do some things administratively; we can do more if we've got folks who are serious in Congress. I can do some things administratively on immigration, but I can't make sure that all the incredible talent that is a huge strength for us compared to our competitors over the next two decades—the fact that young people from around the world want to come here and succeed here and strive here—I can't deliver on that without Congress ultimately acting.

I was up at the Tappan Zee Bridge. I can cut permitting times by more than half to get projects up and running. But if we're going to be serious about dealing with all the bridges and all the roads and airports and ports and broadband lines and smart grid that would put us in a competitive position and put people back to work right now and cut our unemployment, I can't do that unless I've got a Congress that is serious.

So the stakes here are big. And I want people to feel the same sense of urgency about this as they do about a Presidential election. Because ultimately, the elections have never been about me, they've been about, what can we do together? And I cannot do it unless I've got partners like Jack and Michael along with me.

So my main message is one of hope. We've got all the ingredients to make this the American century, just like the last one. To achieve it, though, we've got to make sure our political system works better. And yes, there are all kinds of reforms that we need to do, from campaign finance to how a filibuster works, to going after Republicans hard when their main political agenda when it comes to—or main election strategy is preventing people from voting. We've got to push back on all that stuff. But ultimately, there are enough voters out there to deliver if we can turn them out.

And that's what the DSCC is all about. That's their priority. That's my priority. And I hope it becomes yours as well. Thanks.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:10 p.m. at the residence of Blair W. and Cheryl Cohen Effron. In his remarks, he referred to Sen. Michael F. Bennet, in his capacity as chair of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee; Jaime S. Rubin, former New York State Director, Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force; and Mayor Warren "Bill" de Blasio New York City. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee fundraisers :: New York City, dinner.

*Locations:* New York City.

*Names:* Bennet, Michael F.; de Blasio, Warren "Bill"; Donovan, L.S. Shaun; Effron, Blair W.; Effron, Cheryl Cohen; Obama, Michelle; Reed, John F.; Rubin, Jamie S.

*Subjects:* Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Income inequality, increase; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : High school dropout rate and prevention programs; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Education : Postsecondary education :: College opportunity, expansion efforts; Elections : 2014 congressional elections; Elections : Voter participation; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Housing and Urban Development, Department of : Secretary; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Labor issues : Minimum wage; New Jersey : Hurricane Sandy, damage and recovery efforts; New York : Democratic Party events; New York : Hurricane Sandy, damage and recovery efforts; New York : President's visits; Science and technology : Research and development; ; Democratic Party : Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee; Taxation : Tax Code, reform; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts.

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