

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

**Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser in Seattle,
Washington**

July 22, 2014

The President. Hello, everybody! Thank you so much. Well, first of all, everybody, give Libby a big round of applause. Libby is the same age as Malia, and it turns out that they're both learning how to drive. So we are—Bruce and Ann and I share some concern. [*Laughter*] But they seem like sensible young ladies, so we're hoping that everything goes smoothly this summer.

It is so wonderful to see everybody. There are just a couple people I want to acknowledge. First of all, obviously, for Bruce and Ann to have me back in their house and the whole family here, they've been such great friends and great supporters. So can everybody please just say thank you to them. And we are very grateful to them.

Jay Inslee was here, along with Trudi. They skipped ahead because we're doing something else. But give them a round of applause anyway. You can tell them later that we appreciate them.

Your outstanding mayor, Ed Murray, is here. And County Executive Dow Constantine is here. Dow, by the way, is a new dad—10-week-old daughter. *Mazel tov*. You can't beat daughters. [*Laughter*] You can't—sons, you're okay. [*Laughter*]

Let me start just by talking about something that is obviously of great concern to the people of Washington, and that's the forest fires that have been sweeping across a big chunk of the State. As I was driving over here, I had a chance to talk to the Governor and get a full briefing on what's happened. Obviously, these are very difficult fires. Our firefighters take such risks and sacrifice so much to fight them, but it's a big challenge—and State troopers as well. And we actually lost a State trooper as he was trying to clear out from a fire that was taking place there—a former marine—and I had a chance to speak with his widow and offer our condolences.

So what we've done is to make sure that we are coordinating as best we can with the Federal—or with the State and local officials. We were able to get on the phone—my director of FEMA, Craig Fugate—and we were able to authorize today an emergency declaration when it comes to electrical power, which is one of the most immediate concerns, and then we're going to be working with the State on additional declarations that may need to take place. But I just want to make sure that everybody knows that we are going to be thinking about and then helping people who are being severely affected by these fires.

It is also important to know that I've been talking to Western Governors generally about the issue of forest fires, because although any given year, you can't definitively talk about weather patterns and attribute them to a particular source, what is clear is, the trend lines indicate the potential for increased forest fires. We've seen the budget for forest fires jump at an extraordinary pace over the last several years, so much so that we're going to have to call on Congress to change how we fund forest fires. And a lot of that has to do with drought. A lot of it has to do with changing precipitation patterns. And a lot of that has to do with climate change.

And so I raise that because in all the day-to-day challenges that we face that are extraordinarily important, a long-term challenge that has to be dealt with right now is making sure that the planet works for the next generation and the generation after that. And so we're very proud of the work we're doing right now with our climate action plan to make sure that we're building resilience. And that's what we're talking with a lot of Western Governors about: How can we start adapting our infrastructure to what are already increases in temperature, but then also what can we do to mitigate the damage that's happening in climate change?

All of which brings me to why we're gathered here today, in addition to the nice views. [Laughter] When I came into office, we were facing the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. In fact, the contraction was actually technically more severe than the Great Depression's. The difference is, is that we responded faster. The American people responded with extraordinary resilience. And so if you look at the last 5 years, we've now had 52 straight months of job growth. We've created 10 million jobs. The unemployment rate is the lowest since 2007. [Laughter] We've seen the biggest drop in the unemployment rate in 30 years just this past year. Even the long-term unemployed, which has been a chronic problem, they're starting to be able to get back to work. There are more job openings now than there have been since 2007.

You look at some of the other trends—obviously, the stock market is up, which is not just good for Wall Street, it's also good for a lot of 401(k) holders, who remember how scared they were back in 2009 and 2010. We have seen U.S. companies do extraordinarily well, not just here, but around the world. Exports on the rise. Our deficits have been cut by more than half. Our energy production has been extraordinary. We're now producing more oil in the United States than we are importing, and that's the first time that's happening in a couple of decades. Our natural gas production makes us the leading producer in the world and has skyrocketed. But in addition, when it comes to clean energy, we've tripled the amount of wind power that we have, increased solar power by tenfold, all of which has contributed to the biggest reductions in carbon pollution of any advanced country on Earth.

And so we've made enormous progress across the board on a whole range of fronts, from an auto industry that's come back and is now going to be doubling its fuel efficiency standards to the fact that our high school dropout rate has been reduced. College attendance is in record highs. There are a lot of reasons for optimism. And by the way, there's this one other thing: There are millions of people now who have health care that didn't have it before. And that includes people right here in Washington State.

Audience members. Thank you!

The President. And yet, despite all this, people are anxious. Now, some of that has to do with some big challenges overseas. I am very proud that we have ended one war, and by the end of this year, we will have ended both wars that I inherited before I came into office. But whether people see what's happening in Ukraine, and Russia's aggression towards its neighbors in the manner in which it's financing and arming separatists; to what's happened in Syria, the devastation that Assad has wrought on his own people; to the failure in Iraq for Sunni and Shia and Kurd to compromise, although we're trying to see if we can put together a government that actually can function; to ongoing terrorist threats; to what's happening in Israel and Gaza—part of people's concern is just the sense that around the world, the old order isn't holding, and we're not quite yet to where we need to be in terms of a new order that's based on a different set of principles, that's based on a sense of common humanity, that's based on economies that work for all people.

But here in the United States, what people are also concerned about is the fact that although the economy has done well in the aggregate, for the average person, it feels as if incomes, wages just haven't gone up; that people, no matter how hard they work, they feel stuck. And that's not an illusion. Because what's happened is, is that a lot of our gains, a lot of the progress that's been made in this economy—and this is, like, a 20-, 25-, 30-year trend—have gone to the folks at the very top. And middle class families find themselves with stagnant incomes, even as the cost of health care or the cost of a college education for their kids keeps on skyrocketing.

And part of what people are also anxious about is the fact that government doesn't seem to be responsive, at least at the Federal level, to those concerns. Things in Congress feel broken. And that's why so many people end up feeling cynical, and they feel that, you know what, it doesn't really make any difference—whether it's Democrats, Republicans—nobody is looking out for us. Nobody is thinking about our lives and how maybe we can just get a little help. We're willing to work hard, we are responsible, we're looking after our families, but who's there when things are a little tough or we need to go over a hump, who's there to give us a hand up?

Audience members. You are!

The President. And so—and part of what happens then is, is that people get cynical. And when people get cynical, they withdraw. And you get a spiral effect, a negative spiral in which special interests and those who are most vested in the status quo end up having more power, and people who really need government to work for them, on their behalf, they withdraw, they opt out. And that makes government even more dysfunctional.

So my job every single day is to make sure that people around the country who are working hard and doing the right thing, they know somebody is fighting for them. And that's something that we've been doing with Congress, wherever possible. Today we actually signed a bill. It was shocking. [*Laughter*] I said to the—it was a bipartisan bill. Republicans and Democrats passed it. I said, doesn't this feel good? [*Laughter*] Let's do this again. [*Laughter*] We can do it on immigration reform, or we can do it on the minimum wage, and we can do it on infrastructure spending.

But—uh-oh, see, you guys got us too excited. What happened, everybody? Do we have a backup mike, WHCA? Can you hear me back there?

Audience members. Yeah!

Audience member. There's one behind you.

The President. There's one behind me? You think that might work? [*Laughter*] Might as well try it, right? Testing, one, two, three. Testing, one, two, three. All right, let's try this one. Good idea. [*Laughter*] How's that? No? It was still a good idea, though. Testing, testing. WHCA?

That's all right. You know what? There weren't always mikes around.

Audience member. We can hear you!

The President. You can hear me.

So we passed a bill. So wherever I can make progress with Congress, I want to do it. Because right now there are a whole bunch of things we can do that should not be partisan. We should be willing, as Democrats and Republicans, to work together to rebuild our roads, our

bridges, our airports, a smart grid, all of which would put people to work right now, but would also lay the foundation for economic development in this country for years to come. We should be able to do that. We should be able to help working families who desperately need help on child care and early childhood education. That's something that shouldn't be partisan.

Every study shows if you invest a buck in early childhood education, you get \$7 back. [Inaudible] That's something we shouldn't be doing on a bipartisan basis. When it comes to increasing the minimum wage, 28 million people we could pull out of poverty potentially just by increasing the minimum wage. And when people have money to spend in their pockets, folks at the bottom of the economic ladder, that money gravitates up. It means businesses——

[At this point, the President was given a new microphone.]

The President. Oh, thank you. [Laughter] Testing, one, two, three.

It means businesses have more customers. And you get a virtuous cycle going up. So there are a bunch of things that we know the American people agree with. Immigration reform, we know that it would make the economy stronger, it would drive down the deficit. You would have 11 million people who can come out of the shadows, pay taxes, pay a fine, and then now are able to live out the American Dream, because this has always been a nation of immigrations as well as a nation of laws.

We know how to solve some of our big problems. But what we're going to have to do is break the logjam in Washington. So where I'm able to get Congress to help, I want to work with them. Where I can't get Congress to help, I'm going to do everything I can on my own—[applause]—everything I can on my own. If they don't want to pass a sensible climate change bill, we're going to go ahead and put forward a climate action plan and make sure we're working with the EPA under authorities we already have to reduce carbon.

If they don't want to do something on the minimum wage, at least we can make sure that Federal contractors are paying their workers a minimum wage, in the same way that we can make sure Federal contractors are not discriminating against the LGBT community. You should not have to worry about being fired just because of who you love. The same way that we can make sure that, with respect to Federal contractors, that if women are being paid less than men, they should be able to find out about it and do something about it. Because I believe that when women succeed, America succeeds. And I've got a couple of daughters; the idea that they would be paid less than men infuriates me if they're doing the same job. And I think it does for most Americans.

These should be partisan issues. If Congress can't act, we're going to go ahead and act.

Audience member. Spirit of a—[inaudible].

The President. There you go. A Hawaiian girl here. [Laughter]

But here is the key part for all of you: There are some issues that without Congress we can't solve the way we need to. Only Congress has power of the purse. We can't make sure that everybody across the country has access to affordable childcare without congressional action. We can do some things, but we can't do everything. We can't make sure everybody benefits from a minimum wage, even though States and cities like Seattle are doing the right thing, but there are a whole bunch of folks who don't live in Seattle. Without Congress, we're going to have problems. We can make college loans somewhat more affordable, but with congressional action, we could be doing so much more.

And so the reason you are here today and the reason I'm here today is because I want a Congress that can actually get the job done. I want a Congress that is serious about you. Not serious about their jobs, but serious about your jobs. Not serious about their quality of life, but serious about your quality of life. That's what we're fighting for.

And that's why these midterm elections are so important. I do not want anybody here to succumb to cynicism. Cynicism is a choice, and hope is a better choice. But in order for us to make hope live, in order for hope to be more than just a slogan, we've got to work. We've got to work to make sure that Members of Congress—whether the Senate or the House of Representatives—are serious about you. And I will say, for all the Democrats around here, I'm not overly partisan.

The truth is, my favorite President is the first Republican President. He's a guy named Abraham Lincoln. [Laughter] If you look at historically, Dwight Eisenhower built the Interstate Highway System, and Richard Nixon founded the EPA. And historically, we have had bipartisan cooperation on big issues. The problem is not the Republican Party per se, the problem is this particular group right now—[laughter]—that have kind of gone off the rails. And what we need is people who are serious about solving problems and believe in the possibilities of government not solving every problem, but solving some problems; not solving every problem 100 percent, but maybe solving some problems 50 percent.

We can do that. That is achievable. But it requires the level of participation that, so far, at least, Democrats don't always display. We are very good on Presidential elections; I can testify to that. [Laughter] But sometimes, during midterms we get lazy, and our folks don't turn out. That's going to have to change in this election, and that's why your help today is so important.

Let me just close by saying this, because I think about Libby, and I think about Malia, and I think about the next generation. Sometimes, when you're watching the news—which I generally don't do because I—[laughter]—whatever they're reporting on, I usually know about. [Laughter] But it can get depressing, right? It can feel as if, oh, nothing is working and everything is a crisis. And when I talk to interns at the White House—and we have them in every 6 months or so, these amazing young people, hugely talented—they're idealistic, they're optimistic. And I say to them, don't lose that optimism, don't lose that idealism. If you had to choose a period in human history in which to be born, and you didn't know ahead of time who you were going to be and what position or what nationality, you just had to choose what's the timeframe, you would choose now.

The world has never been healthier, it has never been wealthier, it has never been more tolerant, there's never been more opportunity than there is today. That doesn't mean that there aren't extraordinary problems out there to be solved. That doesn't mean that there aren't huge challenges that we have to meet. But it is worth remembering that even in this country, the greatest country on Earth, 50 years ago I couldn't be standing here; that 25 years ago, your mayor couldn't be married. And because of this extraordinary impulse in all of us to imagine and dream something better and then work for it and not give up and be persistent and pick ourselves up and dust ourselves off after setbacks and being willing to endure skeptics and naysayers—because of that spirit—we've been able to make enormous changes.

This week was the 45th anniversary of man landing on the Moon. And I had Buzz Aldrin, Michael Collins, and the wife of Neil Armstrong into the White House yesterday. And I thought about how, when I was 6, 7, 8 years old, sitting on my grandfather's shoulder in Hawaii as the capsules were brought back from the *Apollo* launches, nobody went to the Moon because they were skeptics. Naysayers didn't send anybody to the Moon. That singular moment

in human history, that happened because of that spirit. And that spirit has to translate in our politics as well.

That's why you're here. That's why we've got to get to work. That's why I ran for President. And if we allow that spirit to live, nothing can stop us.

Thank you, everybody. Appreciate you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:04 p.m. at the residence of Bruce and Ann Blume. In his remarks, he referred to Libby Blume, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Blume; Gov. Jay R. Inslee of Washington and his wife Trudi; Sabrina K.A. Constantine, daughter of King County Executive Dow Constantine; retired Washington State Trooper Robert Koczewski, who died during a wildfire on July 14, and his wife Pat; President Bashar al-Asad of Syria; *Apollo 11* crewmembers Edwin E. "Buzz" Aldrin, Jr., and Michael Collins; and Carol Armstrong, wife of the late *Apollo 11* crewmember Neil A. Armstrong. He also referred to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, which was approved July 22 and assigned Public Law No. 113–128. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Democratic National Committee fundraisers :: Seattle, WA.

Locations: Seattle, WA.

Names: Aldrin, Edwin E. "Buzz," Jr.; Asad, Bashar al-; Blume, Ann; Blume, Bruce; Blume, Libby; Collins, Michael; Constantine, Dow; Constantine, Sabrina K.A.; Fugate, W. Craig; Inslee, Jay R.; Inslee, Trudi; Armstrong, Carol; Koczewski, Pat; Koczewski, Robert; Murray, Edward B.; Obama, Malia; Obama, Natasha "Sasha".

Subjects: Civil rights : Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, equality; Congress : Bipartisanship; Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Disaster assistance : Washington; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Income inequality, increase; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Early childhood education programs; Elections : 2014 congressional elections; Elections : Voter participation; Employment and unemployment : Job training and assistance programs; Energy : Domestic sources; Energy : Greenhouse gas emissions, regulation; Environment : Carbon emissions; Environment : Climate change; Government organization and employees : Federal Government contracting policies, reform; Homeland Security, Department of : Emergency Management Agency, Federal; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Iraq : Reconciliation efforts; Israel : Gaza conflict; Labor issues : Minimum wage; Natural disasters : Wildfires, prevention and response efforts; Palestinian Authority and Palestinians : Gaza :: Conflict with Israel; Russia : Relations with Ukraine; Syria : Civil war and sectarian conflict; Syria : President; Ukraine : Political unrest and violence; Ukraine : Russia, role; Washington : Democratic Party event; Washington : Disaster assistance; Washington : Governor; Washington : President's visit; Washington : Wildfires, damage and recovery efforts.

DCPD Number: DCPD201400559.