

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser in Los Angeles, California

July 23, 2014

The President. Hello, everybody. Hello, Los Angeles. Oh, this is a nice looking crowd. You all got dressed up. [*Laughter*] Don't you look cute? Everybody, have a seat. Have a seat. Relax.

It is good to be in Los Angeles. Let me first of all say thank you to Shonda for opening up this unbelievable space and arranging for perfect weather. Give Shonda a big round of applause. I've gotten to know Shonda over the last couple years, and for somebody who is just so successful and is doing so much, you can't ask for somebody who is more humble and more thoughtful and has shown incredible kindness to me and my family. And I am very, very proud to know her and to call her a friend. So I just want to say thank you so much for everything you do, not just for me, but for a lot of people who she's given unbelievable opportunities to. So give Shonda a big round of applause. We love Shonda.

Kerry Washington I want to thank. Kerry—there are few people who worked harder on my campaign, even back when people didn't pronounce my name right—[*laughter*]—than Kerry Washington. And she has been—she's not a latecomer. She didn't jump on the bandwagon. She pushed when the wagon was stuck in the mud; she was out there. [*Laughter*] And she's just been a great friend. Plus she showed me her baby pictures, and that is one cute baby. And I want to thank her and the entire host committee for helping to set this up.

My girl, Janelle Monáe. Janelle has performed at the White House, like, 15 times. And we—there's going to be an official Janelle Monáe room in the White House. [*Laughter*] We love her. Michelle and I love Janelle. We love her energy. We love her talent. But we most of all, love her character. And anybody who gets a chance to talk to her, this is just a remarkable, strong, smart young lady.

And I have to say nice things about her because she may be the only person in possession of a video in which I try to keep up with her and Usher on the dance floor. [*Laughter*] Now, this is top secret. She has promised that this will never be released. But she can blackmail me at any time. [*Laughter*]

Musician Janelle Monáe. I love you!

The President. I love you back. You do have that video, though, don't you?

Ms. Monáe. I do. [*Laughter*]

The President. Now, tell the truth, though, Janelle, I wasn't bad, though, was I? [*Laughter*] I'm just saying. Go ahead, testify just a little bit.

Ms. Monáe. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Let me say, I did not drop in splits. [*Laughter*] But I did bust a move. That I did do. [*Laughter*]

Finally, let me say thank you to somebody who's been tireless on behalf of the Democratic Party. She is a great Congresswoman, but she is also an outstanding chair of the DNC, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, all the way from Florida. Where's Debbie? She's around here somewhere.

So a little over 5 years ago, I took office at one of the most difficult times in our history. And when I reflect back on those 5 years—and every gray hair that I have to prove that 5 years have passed—I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that by almost every economic measure, we're better off now than we were then. Ronald Reagan used to ask when he was campaigning, "Are you better off than you were 4 years ago?" Well, you know what, I don't mind answering that question, mostly because of the skill and resilience and strength of the American people, but also because we put in place some wise policies.

We've seen the unemployment rate drop faster this past year than any time in the last 30, and we now have an unemployment rate that's lower than it was before the financial crisis. We have seen the deficits drop by more than half. We've seen millions of people get health care that didn't have it before. We've seen health care inflation at the slowest rate in 50 years. High school dropouts are down. College graduations are up. An auto industry that was on the brink of bankruptcy is now thriving. Manufacturing, the strongest that it's been since the 1990s.

When I came into office, you asked investors around the world what's the best place to invest in, and they would say China. Today, they say the United States of America. So, economically, we've made enormous progress. Socially, we've made progress.

When I came into office, we still saw that there were people who were serving this country, putting their lives on the line, who couldn't tell the truth about who they were and who they loved. And we ended "don't ask, don't tell," and we helped to argue against DOMA. And ultimately, we've now seen this amazing transformation in terms of how our LGBT brothers and sisters are treated all across the country.

We've ended one war; we're in the process of ending another. We've made sure that millions of those returning veterans are able to get the kind of college education or skills that they need in order to find a job.

Across the board, you could argue that we're in a better place. But—and here's the "but." You knew there was a "but"; otherwise, there wouldn't be much of a call to arms here. The truth is, is that people across the country still feel anxious. And the question is, why? Well, one of the reasons they feel anxious is because even though the stock market has hit record highs, and even though corporate profits have hit record highs, for the vast majority of folks in the middle class or people striving to get into the middle class, their wages, their incomes have flatlined. No matter how hard they work, they feel as if they're treading water. And that's not a 1-year trend, that's not a 5-year trend—although the great recession made it much worse—that's a 20-, 30-year trend.

People don't feel as if the basic American Dream—if you work hard and you act responsibly you can get ahead—that that is sufficiently realized for all Americans. So we got some folks who are doing very well, but there are a whole lot of folks who still aren't.

People are still feeling anxious because some of the paths of opportunity for people who were born in a tough situation, those paths seem to be narrower and narrower. It's harder to get money to go to college. If you do get to college, you're loaded up with a whole lot of debt. The jobs that might be available if you go may not allow you to service those debts. And so young people start feeling anxious; they're not sure whether their hard work will pay off in the future.

Obviously, people are concerned about some of the turmoil that's taking place around the world. And they look at the Middle East, and they see a transition from an old order to a new

order, and they're not sure how that's going to happen, and the terrible violence that occurs as a result.

But the conflict that probably makes people most discouraged is the conflict they see in Washington, where Members of Congress can't seem to do anything, where all we hear about is gridlock and all we hear about is posturing and all we hear about are phony scandals. And no offense, "Scandal" is a great show—[laughter]—but it's not something that we necessarily want to be living out day in, day out. And the truth is, is that what we see on the nightly news or on cable news is just this constant clamor of hot air and folks posturing and opinionating, but not actually doing any work that focuses on the people who sent them there.

And those two things are connected: the idea that the economy is not working for everybody and that the Government isn't working for anybody. Because the truth of the matter is, when you look at our history, our economy has always grown best when it grows from the middle out, from the bottom up, not from the top down. When everybody gets a chance, everybody does well.

But typically, throughout our history, the way that has happened is that the entrepreneurship and drive and energy and focus of the American people is then combined with some collective efforts through our Government to give people a shot. The G.I. bill for folks coming back from World War II. Medicare and Medicaid and Social Security for seniors; if they've worked a lifetime, they shouldn't be living in poverty. The ability for me or Michelle to go to college because somebody was out there providing grants and loans that were affordable. Decent public schools, decent public parks, a sense of community, and a willingness to invest in the next generation—even if our kids were going to be okay, we decided, you know what, we want every child to have that same shot.

That's how we grew this economy. That's how we became an economic superpower. And so when Government doesn't work at all, it means that it's much harder for folks to get a handle, an ability to climb up those ladders into the middle class.

Now, I know I may be preaching to the choir here, but let me just be clear: The reason Government is not working is not because both parties are just at fault and a plague on both their houses, nobody has integrity, politicians are all the same, they're all—no. Democrats are not perfect. No—[laughter]—we got some strong partisan Democrats here. [Laughter] Let me just say, Democrats are not perfect. There are some times where we've done some stupid stuff. There have been times where we've been on the wrong sides of issues. There are Democrats who are more interested in getting elected than getting things done. There are Democrats who sometimes cater to special interests.

But the truth of the matter is that the reason right now we don't have a Government that's working for the American people is because the Republican Party has been taken over by people who just don't believe in government; people who think that the existing arrangements where just a few folks who are doing well, and companies that pollute should be able to pollute, and companies that want to cheat you on your credit card should be able to do that, and that anything goes—that's their philosophy. And as a consequence, they have no interest in seeing anything work. The people they're fighting for and working for, stuff is working for them just fine.

And so they obstruct, and they obfuscate, and they bamboozle, and they sometimes don't tell exactly what's true—that was a euphemism. [Laughter] And the reason it works for them is because so often we look at what's happening and we say, you know, we don't really like the

Republicans and what they're doing, but if nothing is working, it's not worth my time to get involved. And people grow cynical, and people grow discouraged. And over time they start thinking, you know what, all politicians are the same. And most folks don't have the time to sort out all the intricacies of Obamacare or Benghazi or this or that. They don't have time for that. All they know is, it's not working for them. And so people then pull out, and they drop out, and they don't work. And that further entrenches those who are protecting an unjust status quo.

And so I'm here today—and I hope you are here today—to help to break that cycle of cynicism. We can't afford to be cynical. We've got so much to do. As much as we've done over the last 5 years, we've got so much more to do. And the truth of the matter is, is that if we are serious about helping the middle class and people trying to get into the middle class, we know what to do. We know that if we raise the minimum wage, then there are 28 million who are helped. Janelle has spoken movingly about her family and her mom working, cleaning other folks' mess. I tell you what, there are a whole bunch of folks out there who if they have a higher minimum wage, it helps them. It makes a difference in their lives. We know it. And by the way, if they have more money in their pockets, that means they're spending more money and businesses are doing better, not worse.

We know that if we were helping more families with childcare and early childhood education, our kids would be better. Every dollar we put into early childhood education, we get \$7 back and lower dropout rates and lower teen pregnancies and lower substance abuse. And by the way, then parents are helped because they don't have the worry of whether or not somebody is going to be looking after their children safely and properly when they have to go off to work. We know that. Other countries are able to provide that. Why aren't we? Wealthiest nation on Earth.

We know that women are still getting paid 77 cents on the dollar. We've proposed to make sure that we strengthen the laws that ensure equal pay for equal work. I've got two daughters. I don't want some boy getting paid more than my daughters for doing the same job. And that's not just good for women, that's good for America. When women succeed, America succeeds. We know that. Why aren't we moving forward on that?

We know we could be doing more to make college more affordable, helping young people lower their costs so that they start a family or start a business when they—when I graduated from college in the eighties, I didn't have any money. I was relying on loans and grants and working during the summer and working during the year. But I was able to pay off most of my debt in about a year, and I wasn't making a lot of money that first year.

Young people now, they're averaging \$25,000, \$26,000 in debt when they come out of school. And they start in a hole. I said average. There are some folks who have got more. We could be helping them. Why aren't we?

We could be rebuilding America right now. We've got \$2 trillion in deferred maintenance. Shonda just moved into this house. She was telling me how she's going to have to do a few renovations. *[Laughter]* Well, you know what, America is still relying on roads and bridges and dams and water systems that were built in the thirties and forties and fifties and sixties, when we had a sense of common purpose. Why aren't we rebuilding all that stuff? We could be putting folks to work right now, retraining young men and women to be out there rebuilding our roads, our bridges, our ports, our electrical grid, our airports, all of which would make our economy more efficient and would help families right now.

So we know what to do. The problem is, is that there's no political will to get it done. And that's where you come in. That's where you come in. I know that sometimes people got so excited back in 2008, they though, all right, we elect Barack, and that's it. *[Laughter]* That's it. Despite the fact that some of you remember—some of you were there in 2008; you might have gone to an early rally in 2007, 2008. And what would I tell you? I told you at the time this is not about me, this is about getting our democracy to work, getting everybody involved and engaged. And when we win, that's not the end, that's the beginning. It gives us the opportunity to start doing stuff, and we have to continue to be involved. And that means that I've got to have a Congress that has some sense and is willing to work and is willing to compromise and is focused on the American people. And we don't have that right now. And since we don't have it right now, we're going to have to work a little harder to get a Congress that works on behalf of the American people.

Now, one of the problems with Democrats is, we're real good on Presidential elections. We get real excited. But during midterm elections, people don't even know there's an election, don't know who their Congressman is, don't know who their Senators are. And as a consequence, the other side tends to vote at higher rates. We're disproportionately young. We're disproportionately minority, disproportionately single women. And we don't vote at the same rates. And so the midterms come around, and lo and behold, we're surprised when John Boehner is the Speaker of the House. Say, well, how did that happen? *[Laughter]* What happened to Nancy Pelosi? What happened was, you all didn't work. That's what happened. *[Laughter]* And then all kinds of—*[laughter]*—stuff happened. *[Laughter]* That's what it was—stuff. *[Laughter]*

So we've got to step it up in the midterms, not when it's easy, not when it's sexy, not when there's "Hope" posters and Janelle singing and it's all cute. We've got to be in the trenches when it's hard. And it's hard right now, but now is exactly when everybody has got to step up. You got to step up. And if you do step up, then we're going to make progress. We're not going to solve every problem, but we'll make progress.

We'll be able to continue to develop our energy in this country in a way that also protects our environment and prevents climate change. We'll be able to put people to work rebuilding cars for the future that have twice the fuel efficiency—save you money, save our environment.

If you work hard, we will get a minimum wage increase that will help millions of people. If you are willing to engage, we'll get "equal pay for equal work" legislation passed. If you're willing to work hard, we'll rebuild some roads and bridges and put people back to work. If you are willing to work hard, then we can help to transform our criminal justice system so we don't just have a pipeline from schools to jails, but instead we got pipelines from schools to college to jobs—if you're willing to work.

If you're willing to work, then the incredible progress we've already made on the Affordable Care Act will be expanded, and more States will make sure that more people have the health care that they need and they won't go bankrupt if they get sick. We'll be able to make college more affordable. We'll make progress.

So let me just—let me wrap by saying this: Sometimes, in life as well as in politics, we don't get 100 percent of what we want right away. And in life, at least, I think when I'm talking to Malia and Sasha, and they confront a setback or an obstacle, I don't tell them, well, you should just quit. That's not the lesson I teach them. I tell them, yes, this is what life is like, and as you approach adulthood, you will confront more obstacles and more difficulties. But if you

apply yourself, if you are persistent, if you're focused, if you have a vision about where you want to go, you'll get there.

Well, politics is no different. Sometimes, we're so steeped in cynicism, we are so convinced that nothing can change and nothing can happen, we forget the kinds of changes that have already been made.

We got interns coming to the White House every 6 months—incredibly talented, accomplished, idealistic young people. And they come and they're having so much fun getting to know each other, and they're working in our offices. And then at the end, I speak to them as a group, and I answer a bunch of their questions, and invariably one of them will ask, "Well, you know, Mr. President, what's a piece of advice for us about how we can accomplish our goals?" Or, "How we can show leadership?" Or what have you. I said, you know, most of it is just persistence. And persistence, however, requires a sense of hope. Persistence requires a sense of optimism. You can't be persistent if you're cynical. You can't be persistent if you don't believe that at some point this work will pay off.

And so I always tell the interns, I said, listen, if you had a choice of any moment in human history to be born, and you don't know who you're going to be, you don't know that—there's no guarantee you're going to be Shonda. [Laughter] There's no guarantee that you're going to be rich, there's no guarantee that you're going to be a certain gender or a certain race or for that matter, even a certain nationality. You're just asking, when should you be born in the history of human race, you'd choose now.

Mankind has never been wealthier, healthier, more tolerant, better educated than it is now this moment. And why is that? The reason is, is because 50 years ago and 100 years ago and 200 years ago, some people looked out and said, you know what, I think we can do things better. We can organize society better. We can be more just. We can be more fair. We can give more people opportunity. And they fought for it, and it didn't always happen right away.

We fought a civil war in this country that ended in the early 1860s. It took 90 years before the Supreme Court was even willing to affirm what the 13th and 14th and 15th Amendment said, and declare "separate but equal" unconstitutional. Almost 100 years from the bloodiest war in our history on our soil, just to get the Supreme Court to even acknowledge what had been the object of the fight. And then it took 10 years from the time that *Brown vs. Board of Education* was passed until 1964 when the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act started to become law that could actually implement the rulings of the Court. And then it took another 10, 15, 20 years before genuine opportunity opened up for a lot of folks.

And at each juncture, somebody could have said, this is too hard, and it ain't getting—it ain't ever going to happen. And in fact, people did, just like they told me I couldn't be President. [Laughter]

So my point is, nothing worthwhile has ever been accomplished by the cynics and the naysayers. This week is the 45th anniversary of Neil Armstrong landing on the Moon. Now, I remember sitting on my grandfather's shoulders when I was 6, 7, 8 years old—probably 5 or 6, actually. And I grew up in Hawaii, and I'd watch the astronauts come back in the capsules because they'd be picking them up out of the Pacific Ocean. And we'd be waving flags, and you could see the capsule from a distance. And I had Buzz Aldrin and Mike Collins and the wife of Neil Armstrong into the Oval Office just to celebrate. And we started talking, and we all agreed it wasn't the cynics and the naysayers that sent a man to the Moon. There were a whole bunch of folks who said you couldn't do that. It was the folks who said, no, we can do that; yes, we can.

Just like it was the folks who said, yes, we can overcome slavery; yes, we can overcome Jim Crow; yes, we can get a voting rights act passed. At every juncture, it's not the cynics, but it's those who are filled with hope that get things done. Cynicism is a choice. Hope is a better choice.

And so, yes, we've been through 5 years of tough times, and yes, sometimes, politics looks nasty, and yes, it can be discouraging, and yes, we're going to have setbacks. And every step forward we take, sometimes, we'll get two steps back, and we'll start feeling like it's not worth it.

But remember, every single one of us here, at some point somebody was fighting for you when it wasn't likely that they would succeed. And we've got the same obligation to Kerry's young daughter and your sons and daughters and Malia and Sasha. And if we have that same sense of urgency in this midterm election, I am absolutely confident we can get a Congress that can work.

And I've got 2 years left in this Presidency. I want to get a whole bunch of stuff done. I need your help. So let's go out there and work.

Thank you, everybody. God bless you. God bless America. God bless Debbie Allen. Love you guys. Thank you. And Berry Gordy too. Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:13 p.m. at the residence of Shonda Rhimes. In his remarks, he referred to actor Kerry Washington and her daughter Isabelle Amarachi Asomugha; musician Usher T. Raymond IV; *Apollo 11* crewmembers Edwin E. "Buzz" Aldrin, Jr., and Michael Collins; and Carol Armstrong, wife of the late *Apollo 11* crewmember Neil A. Armstrong; actor Debbie Allen; and Berry Gordy, Jr., founder, Motown Records. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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Names: Allen, Debbie; Armstrong, Carol; Asomugha, Isabelle Amarachi; Boehner, John A.; Collins, Michael; Edwin E. "Buzz" Aldrin, Jr.; Gordy, Berry, Jr.; Monáe, Janelle; Obama, Malia ; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Pelosi, Nancy; Raymond, Usher T., IV; Rhimes, Shonda; Washington, Kerry; Wasserman Schultz, Deborah.

Subjects: Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; California : Democratic Party events; California : President's visits; Civil rights : Civil rights movement; Civil rights : Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, equality; Civil rights : Wage equality; Congress : House of Representatives :: Minority leader; Congress : House of Representatives :: Speaker; Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Improvement; Education : Early childhood education programs; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Elections : Voter participation; Energy : Fuel efficiency standards, strengthening efforts; Environment : Climate change; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Labor issues : Minimum wage; Middle East : Political unrest and violence; Space program : First Moon landing, 45th anniversary; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts; Veterans : Job training and education assistance.

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