

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser in New York City
October 7, 2014

The President. Hello, everybody! It's good to be back in New York City, even though I mess up your traffic. [*Laughter*] I feel bad about that. But I do love New York.

First of all, to Ed and Betsy, I just want to thank you so much for everything you did to make this such a rousing success. And to all the host committee, thank you, guys. Give them a big round of applause. The DNC treasurer, Andy Tobias, works tirelessly day in, day out. Give Andy a big round of applause. And thank you, Nickel Creek, for your outstanding performance. You can find them on iTunes. They are very good. [*Laughter*]

I was here in New York just a couple weeks ago—you noticed the traffic was even worse then—during the United Nations General Assembly annual gathering of world leaders. And it's appropriate to talk a little bit on the front end about why this particular General Assembly was so indicative of America's position in the world. There are times where I think in this country we doubt ourselves, and there are times when we're uncertain of all the changes that are taking place all across the globe. And understandably, when you see the headlines every single day and you read about ISIS and Ebola and the Russian incursions into Ukraine, there's a sense possibly that the world is spinning so fast and nobody is able to control it.

And yet if you look at what happened at the General Assembly on the terrorist group ISIS and the need to mobilize an international community to push back against their radical violence, it was the United States that mobilized that coalition both in the Middle East and around the world.

When you look at Ebola, a humanitarian crisis in West Africa, but also a public health crisis that has the possibility of affecting people around the world, it was the United States that is committed to building the infrastructure that allows health workers to get in and start saving lives and making sure that children aren't dying on the streets.

When it came to blunting Russian aggression, it was the United States that mobilized NATO countries and the world community to stand up for the principle that people are independent and have the ability to make their own decisions about their own lives and to seek freedom and prosperity on their own terms.

On climate change, it was the United States that led the way in continuing to mobilize the world community to reduce carbon emissions that are going to affect our kids and our grandchildren.

On every single issue of importance, when there are challenges and there are opportunities around the world, it's not Moscow they call; it's not Beijing. They call us. Because they understand that for all the challenges we sometimes face and the mistakes that we occasionally make, that America continues to be the one indispensable nation and that what we stand for—liberty and democracy and conservation and fairness and justice—those are the things that people around the world aspire to and seek, and they expect the United States to be on their side.

And that's something we can be very proud of. It's a burden. It means we do more than anybody else. We're asked to respond even by folks who are critical of us. People don't always

appreciate the work that we do. But in the end, it's a burden that we bear proudly because it's part of what makes us American and it's part of what that lady with the torch in the middle of the water means. It's part of what attracts people from every corner of the globe to this country, understanding that for all our flaws, there's something essential that we stand for that nobody else does, and we're willing to put our money and time and effort and resources and occasionally our lives on behalf of that.

Now, we can only show that leadership if we also have a country that's working on behalf of its own citizens. And when I came into office, we were losing 800,000 jobs a month; we were facing an economic contraction that was actually worse than the Great Depression's in just pure economic terms. And 6 years later—I gave a speech at Northwestern the other day just to kind of give people an impression of what exactly has happened over the last 6 years.

We've lowered the unemployment rate from 10 percent down to 5.9. We've seen now 55 months of uninterrupted private sector job growth, the longest uninterrupted job growth in history. We saved an auto industry that was on the brink of collapse. We stabilized the financial system and have reformed it so that no bank is too big to fail at this point, and we're trying to make sure that we are avoiding the kind of reckless behavior that caused the crisis in the first place.

Millions of people have health care who didn't have it before. And by the way, health care inflation has slowed to the lowest point in 50 years, so much so that Medicare and Medicaid will now save about \$188 billion because costs are lowered than anticipated, which is part of the reason why we now have cut the deficit by more than half.

High school graduation rates are up, reading scores are up, math scores are up, college attendance is up. Energy production is the highest that it's ever been. Clean energy production, we've now increased solar power by tenfold, wind power by threefold, doubled fuel efficiency standards on cars.

We have ended "don't ask, don't tell." We stopped defending DOMA. All across the country now, couples who love each other are able to join in that most meaningful of unions.

There's no economic measure, including the stock market, including corporate balance sheets, where we're not better off now than we were when I came into office.

But in the same way that people are anxious about what's happening around the world, people are still anxious about what's happening here at home. And for good reason, because despite the growth, despite the increases in productivity, despite the recovery of the housing market, despite the drop in unemployment, the one trend that has been going on for 20, 30 years now hasn't yet been solved, and that is, is that wages and incomes are stagnant and the prosperity that we see all around us is not broadly shared across the population. The average family in State after State, city after city, still feels as if it's tougher to get ahead now than it ever was. And most importantly, they worry about what the future holds for their kids and their grandkids.

And so everything I've done since I've been in office was not just to get back to where we were, but also to tackle this issue: How do we make sure the prosperity is broadly shared? How do we make sure that if you work hard in this country, no matter what you look like, where you come from, what faith you hold, who you love, that if you work hard in this country, you can get ahead, you can make it.

That's what we've been fighting for. And we have achieved so much, but we still have so much to do, because on that issue the Democrats stand for one thing, one vision of the economy, and the Republicans stand for another.

We believe in raising the minimum wage. We think that if you work full time in this country, you shouldn't live in poverty. Republicans disagree. We believe in fair pay laws that make sure that women get paid the same as men for doing the same work. They disagree.

We believe in comprehensive immigration reform, because we know that we are a nation of immigrants and that if we are welcoming talent from around the world and rationalizing the system, we can secure our borders and make sure that America remains a beacon for people all around the world. And it will be good for our economy and will reduce our deficit. And because our workforce will be younger, we will grow faster. Republicans, so far at least in the House of Representatives, they disagree.

Audience member. Boo!

The President. I always say, don't boo, vote.

We believe in rebuilding our infrastructure all across the country, our roads, our bridges, our water mains, our sewer lines. It's not sexy, but we've got \$2 trillion worth of deferred maintenance. If we put people back to work right now, it's not just going to benefit guys in hard hats and gals in hard hats, it's going to benefit all of us, because it will make the economy more productive, it will create jobs not just in construction, but in engineering and in advertising and manufacturing. Huge opportunities there, but unfortunately, so far at least, we can't get Republicans to cooperate.

We believe in investing in early childhood education. We know every dollar we put into early childhood education we get \$7 back in kids who are doing better and not dropping out at the same rates and less likely to be involved in the criminal justice system, more likely to go to college and more likely to succeed and be successful citizens. The other side doesn't think that's a commitment we should make.

We believe in things like family leave, because we think that if a parent sees a sick child, they should be able to get time off and be able to afford to take a day off for a sick child or a sick parent.

On each and every one of these issues, there's a contrast. And what it really boils down to is, do you think our economy does best, do you think our society does best, do you think our politics do best when everybody is in the game, when everybody is getting a fair shot, when prosperity is broadly shared and economic growth is based on the idea of a growing, thriving middle class and ladders for opportunity for people who want to get into that middle class? And the other side thinks, no, no, what we should just be doing is allowing prosperity to all stay at the top and maybe trickle down, eliminate regulations on banks or credit card companies or polluters, and that that somehow is going to unleash the power of the American economy.

And history is on our side. Facts are on our side. And the good news is, the American people are on our side. On issue after issue, when you actually ask folks, they agree with us by wide margins.

But here's the catch. Democrats have a congenital disease: We do not vote in midterm elections. We don't vote at the same rates in midterm elections as we do at Presidential elections. And when you combine that with gerrymandering and the shenanigans around voting

rights that you see in State after State, what ends up happening is, is that we have more folks who agree with us, but all too often, they end up winning some of these elections.

And we just can't afford that right now. Too much is at stake. I've run my last campaign. Michelle is deeply grateful. *[Laughter]* But the issues I'm fighting for, the issues that I will continue to fight for even after I leave this office, those issues are at stake. And we've got to be willing to fight for them. We've got to feel a sense of urgency about this at a time when, frankly, the press and Washington, all it does is feed cynicism.

Most of you don't know the statistics I just gave you. And the reason you don't know them is because they elicit hope. They're good news. They shouldn't be controversial. And that's not what we hear about. We hear about phony scandals, and we hear about the latest shiny object, and we hear about how Washington will never work.

But you know what, cynicism is a choice. Cynicism didn't send a man on the Moon. Cynicism never cured a disease. Cynicism didn't win women or Blacks the right to vote. Cynicism never built a business or created a job. Cynicism is a choice. And hope is a better choice.

And when I ran in 2008, I talked about hope. And sometimes, people ask me—even in the photo line I took just now, people asked, oh, how do you do it? Everything is so negative. Seems like there's so many problems. How do you do it, Mr. President? And I tell people—and this is true—I've never been more hopeful than I am now.

I look back at what we've been able to accomplish over the last 6 years—why, why wouldn't I feel hopeful? Why wouldn't I feel hopeful about what we can do in the next 2 if we've got a Congress that is willing to work and reflects the decency and the values of the American people?

I am profoundly optimistic about America. I need you to be also. And then I need you to express your optimism not just in voting yourselves, but in getting involved. We've got a month. And the work that we do, the money we raise, the doors that we knock on, the phone calls that we make, can make a difference, because some of these races will be decided by a few hundred votes, a few thousands votes. But the consequences of just us voting an extra 1 percent or 2 percent could make the difference as to whether we're able to preserve a woman's right to make her own health care decisions, could end up making a difference in terms of whether poor kids around the county have a decent shot at life, could end up making a difference in terms of whether we're able to fund the science and the research that is so important for our future. Just 1 or 2 percent.

So bottom line is this: If you feel, as I do, fundamentally hopeful about the American people and fundamentally hopeful about what we can do together, then this next month, I need you to have the same kind of urgency that you have during a Presidential election. Get involved. And this is a great place to start.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:12 p.m. at the White Street restaurant. In his remarks, he referred to Edward Zimmerman, chair of the Tech Group, Lowenstein Sandler LLP, and his wife Betsy. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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