

Administration of Barack Obama, 2015

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Meeting
February 20, 2015

The President. Hello, Democrats! Good to see all of you. Good to see you. This looks like a rowdy crowd. I think Donna got you all—you know, you always got to watch out for Donna. She's—she'll get you in trouble.

Everybody, have a seat. Have a seat. Have a seat.

Audience member. We love you, Obama!

The President. Oh, I love you back. Good to see you.

I want to thank Debbie Wasserman Schultz for being an outstanding chair of our party. She is a great partner. I want to thank our CEO, Amy Dacey, for the hard work she is doing day in and day out. To the Governors and the legislators and the mayors, State party leaders, DNC members, officers, and whoever else is here—[laughter]—young Democrats—I am thrilled to be with you.

Most importantly, thank you to every American in all 50 States who helps our party thrive at the grassroots level every single day. Because that's part of who we are—grassroots.

It's been about a year since our last meeting, and as I had indicated, as I had predicted, it was a breakthrough year for America. Last year, our economy created more than 3 million new jobs, the single best year for job growth since the 1990s. Over the past 5 years, as said, the longest stretch of private-sector job creation in American history, businesses adding nearly 12 million new jobs. And in perhaps the single most hopeful sign for middle class families in a very long time, wages are beginning to rise again.

So America is coming back. We've risen from recession. We have the capacity to write our own future. We're better positioned than any other nation on Earth. And all that is thanks to the hard work and sacrifice of the American people who we serve. But it's also thanks to the values and the policies at the core of this party that all of you have fought for.

As Democrats, we believe in giving every child a world-class education. And today, our younger students have earned the highest math and reading scores on record. Our high school graduation rate is at an alltime high. More Americans are graduating from college than ever before.

As Democrats, we believe in reducing our dependence on foreign oil and protecting our planet. Today, America is number one in oil, number one in gas, number one in wind power. Every 3 weeks, we bring on line as much solar power as we did in the entire year of 2008. And thanks to lower gas prices and higher fuel standards, the typical family should save about 750 bucks at the pump.

As Democrats, we believe in sensible rules that can prevent financial crisis and shield families from ruin and encourage fair competition. And today, we've got new tools to stop taxpayer-funded bailouts, a new consumer watchdog to protect families from predatory lending, new law to protect families from getting ripped off by credit card companies. We've extended the security and fundamental right to affordable, accessible health care to more than 10 million uninsured Americans. And we are counting. Each and every day, folks are signing up

and benefiting because of what we fought for. [Applause] Because of what we fought for. Because of what you fought for.

Now, sometimes, because the news cycle is so quick, we forget how all this came about and the debates that we had last year or 2 years or 4 years or 6 years ago. I just want everybody to remember that at every step as we made policies, as we made this progress, we were told by our good friends, the Republicans—[laughter]—that our actions would crush jobs and explode deficits and destroy the country. I mean, I want everybody to do a fact-check—[laughter]—and go back to 2009, 2010, '11, '12, '13—just go back and look at the statements that were made each year by these folks about all these policies. Because apparently, they don't remember. [Laughter]

But the facts are before us. The economy kept growing. The stock market has more than doubled, restoring the ten—the 401(k)s of millions of people. Our deficits are down by two-thirds. I always find it curious that when a Democrat is President, deficits go down; Republican is President, and then, deficits are going up. And yet they try to take on the mantle of fiscal probity.

Our auto industry is firing on all cylinders. None of this is an accident. It's not an accident that America is creating jobs faster than at any time since the last time a Democrat was President. It's not an accident that our manufacturers are creating jobs for the first time since the last time a Democrat was President. It's not an accident that health care inflation is running at the lowest rate in almost 50 years and that our deficits are falling faster than they have in 60 years.

Audience member. I love you, Obama!

The President. Thank you. [Laughter]

It's because we believe in middle class economics. We believe in the idea that this country does best when everybody gets a fair shot, everybody is doing their fair share, everybody has to play by the same rules. Not top-down economics. Not trickle-down economics. If we were actually to look at the evidence, it's pretty clear whose theory of how to grow the economy and make sure American people are prospering—which theory works. We know their ideas don't work. We remember. Middle class economics, that works. Expanding opportunity, that works.

Now, I say all this not to be complacent, but precisely because we've got more work to do. Our job is not done. We still have a lot of progress to make to ensure that prosperity reaches everybody who goes to work early or studying late into the night, who's scrimping and saving from every paycheck to try to send their kids to college or try to retire with dignity and respect.

Everybody who has the privilege of serving the American people has to ask him- or herself a fundamental question: Are we going to accept an economy where only a few of us do spectacularly well, or will we build an economy that generates rising incomes and opportunities for everybody who's willing to work hard, everybody who's willing to make an effort? That's the question that we face at this moment.

And now that their grand predictions of doom and gloom and death panels and Armageddon haven't come true—[laughter]—the sky hasn't fallen, Chicken Little is quiet—[laughter]—the new plan, apparently, of congressional Republicans—and this is progress—the new plan is to rebrand themselves as the party of the middle class. I'm not making this up. [Laughter]

Our Republican leader in the Senate, as he was coming in, after having tried to block every single thing that we have done to strengthen the economy, starts looking at the job numbers and says, you know, it's getting better because we just got elected—[laughter]—and people are feeling more optimistic. Which—[laughter]—okay. I didn't know that's how the economy worked. But maybe? [Laughter] We'll call some economists.

We have a Republican Congresswoman who said she couldn't agree with me more that we need to be helping working moms and dads. That's good. That's progress. One Republican Senator wrote a policy memo saying that Republicans "must define themselves as the party of the American worker and the party of higher wages." That's good. [Laughter] I'm glad they feel that way. Rand Paul said—Rand is an interesting guy, and Rand—[laughter]—no, he is. And Rand Paul said the Republican Party needs to show up on the South Side of Chicago and shout at the top of its lungs that, "The GOP is the ticket to the middle class." I think that's encouraging that he wants to go to the South Side of Chicago. [Laughter] I want—no, I want all—I want parties to compete everywhere. I think that's a good thing.

And I was just home on the South Side of Chicago yesterday. And I guarantee you that Senator Paul would be welcomed there. We are a friendly bunch. [Laughter] I mean, it's a little strange if people show up and just start shouting at the top of their lungs—[laughter]—but we're friendly, and it would be okay. [Laughter] But I will say this. So I am encouraged that they're speaking about middle class and speaking about wages. But there is this old saying that you can't just talk the talk. Donna, you got to do what?

Democratic National Committee Vice Chair of Voter Registration and Participation Donna L. Brazile. Walk the walk.

The President. You got to walk the walk. We've been walking the walk. And if Republicans are serious about taking on the specific challenges that face the middle class, if they are prepared to walk the walk, we should welcome them. I'll welcome their ideas. There's nothing I'd like more than an opposition party that is willing to engage with us and work with us on these issues.

Maybe they've got different ideas, but genuine ideas about how young people can go to college or how we can make sure that workers are getting raises when the CEO of the company has seen their compensation go up 50 percent or 100 percent. If they've got concrete ideas on these issues, I want to hear them. I've been saying that to them since I came into office. But so far, at least, the rhetoric has not matched the reality.

If you want to help working moms and dads, you can't just dismiss things like childcare and paid leave. Work with us to treat them like the economic priorities that working families know they are.

If you want to be the party of higher wages, come on, join the dozens of cities and States, the companies like the Gap and now Walmart, raising wages, not just because it's the right thing to do, but because it's good for business. Don't stand in the way. You've got votes in Congress. You've got votes in the House. You've got votes in the Senate. Work with us. Join the rest of the country. Give America a raise! Let's go. [Applause] Let's go. Let's go! I'm ready. I'm ready!

If you are serious, if you're really troubled with income inequality, then you can't put forward proposals that give more tax breaks to the folks who are doing the best and millionaires and billionaires and then propose more cuts to the very programs that help working Americans get ahead.

If you want to be the party that's paving the way for people to get into the middle class, a good way to start is stop trying to strip health insurance from millions of Americans and preventive and contraceptive care for millions of women. And stop trying to deport millions of striving young kids who just want to earn their shot at the American Dream like the rest of us. Help us fix a broken immigration system. There are a lot of ways to help the middle class.

So look, I think the shift in rhetoric that they're engaging in is good if it actually leads them to take different actions. If it doesn't, then it's just spin. If it doesn't, if you're just trying to repackage the same top-down economics and use the words "middle class" attached to it, if you're just going to keep on cutting taxes at the top and not raise minimum wages for folks who are struggling, then it's just spin. You're trying to bamboozle folks.

And looking backward is not the answer. We've got to look forward, all of us as Americans. And, Democrats, we've got to be the party that recognizes and responds to what Americans really face in a 21st-century economy. Our brand of middle class economics is very specific. We detail it: Here's what we're going to do. We can show you how it's going to help middle class families and folks striving to get in the middle class. We want to offer young people a stronger start. We want to work to make sure that families have more security in a world of constant change. And so we list out how we're going to help folks afford college. We specify how we're going to provide health insurance to folks who don't have it. We talk about how we can help the young family buy a home or the family entering into the middle age—a retirement that they can count on.

And that means we have to stop treating things like childcare and paid leave as side issues or women's issues. We've got to treat them as economic priorities. It means we've got to stand up for unions. It means that we've got to make sure that women are earning what men do for doing the same job. It means we support a fair living wage. We're very specific about how we want to help ordinary folks.

When we talk about helping people earn higher wages and better skills, we put forward specific programs: Here's more opportunities for job training. Here are apprenticeship programs that give workers the chance to earn higher paying jobs even if they don't have a higher education. Here's how we are going to help Americans burdened with student loans reduce their monthly payments. Here's how we're going to make community college free for every responsible student who wants to improve their lot in life.

Here's our program. What's yours? Tell us how you're helping middle class families, because we've got an agenda, and we know it works. Don't just talk about it.

We know middle class economics means we've got to have the most competitive economy in the world. So we're very clear: Here's how we're going to help businesses churn out good jobs for Americans to fill. And that means working to build a modern transportation and communications system. It means helping more companies sell goods overseas with strong new trade agreements that aren't just free, but fair, and level the playing field for American workers. It means investing in the research and technology that unleashes new jobs and new industries right here in America. We're very clear and specific—it's right there—about how we can do it. And we know it works because we've seen it work before.

We know middle class economics means getting rid of special interest giveaways in our Tax Code for folks who don't need them so we can actually give tax breaks to middle class families who do need them. We know that if we close loopholes that reward companies that stash profits overseas, we can reward companies that invest here in America. We know that if

we close loopholes that allow the top 1 percent to avoid paying taxes on their accumulated wealth, we can use that money to help more middle class families pay for childcare and send their kids to college, and that will help the entire economy grow. We need a Tax Code that helps working Americans trying to get a leg up in this new economy, and that's worth fighting for.

And so we don't just talk the talk, we're walking the walk every day. I'm telling you, Democrats, we should never worry about fighting for these issues, because they are not only right, the American people stand right beside us on most of those issues. That—sometimes, that gets lost with all the money that's being spent by outside forces, the distortions and confusion. But when you actually look at do Americans agree with our policies, do they think these policies would help them, and when there's a fair presentation of the policies the other side is offering, the American people are with us every time.

But maybe we'll bring them around. [*Laughter*] And I think there are actual places where we can work together, like reforming America's criminal justice system so it protects and serves all of us and it is fair. And I'm looking forward to working with them. But until they start wanting to walk and not just talk, we're going to keep offering the American people something better. We're going to offer the American people a vision that believes in opportunity not just for a few, but for everybody.

We've got to be the party that believes nobody should be treated like a second-class person regardless of what you look like or where you come from or who you love. We've got to be the party that doesn't just recognize the threat of climate change, but actually does something about it for the sake of our kids. We're the party that's willing to make tough decisions.

We've got to be the party that practices a better kind of politics, not just in Washington, but in every community in America, and that appeals to the basic decency of the American people; that sees our differences as a source of strength; that give young people a sense of purpose and possibility and asks them to participate in our great democracy; that appeals not to fear, but to hope.

Because this is not just about us in this room. This is not just a sports contest. This is not just about who's up and down at any given point. It's not about notches on a belt. It's not about ideological battles or proving how smart you are. It's not about the back-and-forth of politics. It's about doing things that make people's lives better. It's about doing things that make us confident that America will continue on this upward trajectory that began so many years ago. It's about making this Nation we love more perfect.

We are Democrats. We don't just want people to share in America's success, we want to see everybody contributing to America's success and building a smarter and stronger economy, forging a better and kinder society and writing the next great chapter in this great country's amazing story. That's what we're doing together, still moving forward.

Thank you, Democrats. God bless you. God bless America. Let's get to work.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:10 a.m. at the Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill hotel.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Democratic National Committee meeting.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Brazile, Donna L.; Dacey, Amy; McConnell, A. Mitchell; Paul, Rand; Wasserman Schultz, Deborah.

Subjects: Children and youth : Childcare, affordability and costs; Commerce, international : U.S. exports :: Expansion; Communications : Broadband and wireless technologies; Congress : Bipartisanship; Congress : Senate :: Majority leader; Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; District of Columbia : Democratic Party events; Economy, national : Financial regulations, strengthening efforts; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Income inequality, increase; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Postsecondary education :: Career training and continuing education; Education : Postsecondary education :: Community colleges; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, repayment options; Energy : Domestic sources; Energy : Gasoline, oil, and natural gas costs; Environment : Climate change; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Labor issues : Minimum wage; Labor issues : Paid family and sick leave; Law enforcement and crime : Criminal justice system, reform efforts; Science and technology : Research and development; Taxation : Tax Code, reform; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts.

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