

*Administration of Barack Obama, 2016*

**Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Reception in Atherton,  
California**

*February 11, 2016*

*The President.* Hello, everybody! It is so good to see all of you. Partly because, yesterday, I had a wonderful time going back to my home State of Illinois. I was in the State capitol and had a chance to revisit the place where I really started my political career, and it was 16 degrees. [Laughter] Now, I'm not saying that this perfect 70-degree—[laughter]—landscape is the only reason I'm happy to see you. [Laughter] But it doesn't hurt. It is gorgeous.

And I want to obviously start off by thanking Steve and Anita and Matthew and Christie for their hospitality here today. They have been extraordinary friends from the start. There are those folks who got involved before people could pronounce my name. [Laughter] And this is a family that has had my back every step of the way on this incredible journey.

But I also want to thank all of you, the committee that helped put this together. As I look around, I see folks who have been there through thick and thin, through all the ups and downs. And I could not be prouder to be part of this movement that you helped to build. So thank you very much. It means a lot. Thank you.

I want to acknowledge also Henry Muñoz, our DNC chair, who has done great work. There he is in the back. I think he was on his cell phone when I called his name out. [Laughter]

Steve, I think, gave you a little bit of context. I want to build on this. I had a chance to deliver my last State of the Union Address a few weeks back, and it was bitter-sweet. On the one hand, you're thinking, I've got so much more to do and——

*Audience member.* Four more years!

*The President.* Oh, no, definitely not. [Laughter] Not only is there a constitutional provision, but more importantly, Michelle would kill me. [Laughter]

But there's so much more to do, so many more laws we'd like to pass and administrative actions that need to be taken. But on the other hand, there was great satisfaction because we could look back on where we were when we came into office and take enormous pride in the way in which not simply this administration, but the country rose up from extraordinarily difficult times. And because of the resilience and the strength of the American people, we were able to avert a Great Depression, to rebuild the economy on a stronger foundation, drop an unemployment rate from 10 percent down to 4.9 percent. See job growth continue essentially over the last 6, 7 years, each and every month; the manufacturing sector bouncing back, the auto industry that was on the verge of collapse now producing more and better cars than ever before and more fuel-efficient cars.

Doubling the production of clean energy. Wind power we've increased now by—increased threefold, solar power tenfold. Last year, we actually produced more clean energy than we did conventional energy, in terms of bringing new energy on line.

Eighteen million people have health care that didn't have it before. And although there were those who were absolutely certain that not only would the Affordable Care Act collapse the economy and stunt job growth, but they were sure that it would accelerate the cost of

health care. And since the Affordable Care Act passed, health care inflation has actually gone up more slowly than any time in the last 50 years, over the last several years. So it has not only helped people, but it has also begun the long process of making our health care system more effective and more efficient and making sure that people get good, quality care at reasonable costs.

Last year, we saw record high school graduation rates. The reforms that we've initiated in the education system from preschool all the way up through the university systems have made a difference in the lives of millions of kids. We had more young people enroll in college than ever before last year.

We've seen millions of young people who could afford to go to college able to finally afford it because we changed the rules so that instead of having banks serve as middlemen and take billions of dollars out of the student loan system, we started giving that money directly to students and, as a consequence, saved tens of billions of dollars that would allow more young people to go to college than ever before.

We ended the war in Iraq. We brought back—we ended the war in Afghanistan. We brought back tens of thousands of troops. The vast majority of them have returned home. We were able to make sure that Iran would not get a nuclear weapon, and we did so without starting another war.

So I've got a pretty long list. We could keep on going. *[Laughter]* But here's the issue. The incredible success we have had together is not a reason for complacency, it's actually a spur to further action. We know that our job isn't finished. We know that we've got a lot more work to do. So we've got a low unemployment rate, but it could be lower. And over the last 6 months, we've seen wages go up, but we're still looking at 20 years in which, for middle class families, income and wages have not gone up at the same pace as corporate profits have.

There's still growing inequality in our economy that has to be addressed, not only because it distorts our economy and makes it less productive than it could be, but also because it's starts distorting our politics and empowering a handful of people at the expense of the many.

We know that with respect to health care, there are still millions more who could be insured if State governments did what they should in terms of expanding Medicaid. We know that, for example, here in California, the unemployment—the uninsured rate went down much faster because we had a State that was cooperating and working with us and doing what it needed to do. And in places where those States have resisted, oftentimes even though they would save money if they would just go ahead and work with us and abandon their ideological opposition, we haven't made as much progress.

We know that there's still too many kids across California and all across the country that don't have equal opportunity. They're not in the same position that Malia and Sasha and many of your children are in terms of getting an outstanding education that prepares them for a career in the 21st century. And we know that that's not right, that if there's one thing that is at the heart of what America is about, it's the notion that it doesn't matter where you're born, or who your parents are, what your last name is, you should be able to make it if you're willing to try. And we, as a group, collectively, our country should be giving people—our children—the tools that they need to succeed. We know that's true. And we're not there yet.

We know that there are young people who even when they do get to college are burdened enormously by mountains of debt and that we've got to make college not just more accessible,

but also more affordable. And although we've made progress and strides in that area, we've still got more work to do.

We understand that when it comes to climate change, there is such a thing as being too late. And I actually want to—I haven't remarked on this publicly—the Supreme Court did something unusual this week. The centerpiece of our Climate Action Plan involves working with States like California to come up with a strategy for reducing their carbon emissions. We provide States a lot of flexibility and a long runway to do it. But we say we've got to do it.

And we do so under the Clean Air Act, which the Supreme Court itself—this Supreme Court—has said requires the Environmental Protection Agency to regulate carbon emissions if it's shown, as scientists have shown, that it's going to be damaging to the public health. So we're very confident that we're on strong legal footing here. But the Supreme Court issued a stay while the case was being decided on the merits as to whether or not—or said, you can't keep going forward until we've made a decision on this.

One of the reasons I want to talk about this is because in the last couple days, in conversations, I've heard people say, oh, the Supreme Court struck down the Clean Power Plan rule. That's not true. So don't despair, people. *[Laughter]* This is essentially a legal decision to simply say, hold on until we've had a chance to review the legality of it. And we are very firm in terms of our legal position here. As I said, this Supreme Court has said the Environmental Protection Agency is required to regulate carbon emissions if it's a threat to the public health. And we clearly can show that that's the case.

But the reason I bring this up now is to underscore the fact that in what is going to be an enormous generational challenge, there are going to be people who are constantly pushing back, and trying to make sure that we cling on to the old, dirty fuels and an economy built on the polluting, carbon-emitting economic strategy that we need to be moving away from.

We need to be investing in the future, not in the past. Instead of subsidizing to the tune of several billion dollars a year the oil industry, we need to be making sure that we continue to make enormous progress in solar and in wind and in battery technologies and all the things that promise a capacity for us to generate enormous power without destroying the planet for our kids and our grandkids.

And we can't take the work that we've done so far for granted. I could not be prouder that we helped to mobilize 200 nations around the world who said this is a problem and we're going to collectively work to deal with it. That's the essence of American leadership. But that American leadership depends on us. It depends on an administration that believes in science, for example. It depends on making sure that we show it is a lie that somehow we have to choose between economic progress and environmental protection.

All of which brings me to the moment we're in right now. I am not going to be on the ballot again, ever in my life.

*Audience members.* Aww.

*The President.* No, this is a really good thing. *[Laughter]* It doesn't mean that I'm not going to be very active in the public life of this country, because, as I said in the speech that I made in Springfield yesterday, quoting Justice Brandeis, the most important office in a democracy is the office of citizen. And so you and I fellow citizens, our obligations don't go away just because my name is not on the ballot.

It is just as important, we have to be just as passionate about making sure that progress is sustained. And what that requires is that we win back the Senate of the United States so that Democrats are able to move forward the agendas that we care about so deeply. It means that we make progress in winning back the House so that California's own Nancy Pelosi can once again be Speaker of the House. And it means that we make sure that a Democrat replaces me in the White House to carry on the legacy that we're pushing forward.

Look, it's an interesting political moment, right? [*Laughter*] And it's still early in the process. And there's a tendency, I think, for commentators to hyperventilate, because it's good entertainment value, and so every twist and turn, and various candidates pop up and then vanish, and all of this is somehow determinative of what's going to happen. And then, 3, 4 months later, nobody remembers what everybody was—what all the fuss was about because we get down to the real business of electing a President.

But here's what is true: that despite all the progress we've made, despite the fact that the country is indisputably, demonstrably better today than it was when I took office on just about every measure, what is true is, is that people are anxious. People remember what happened in 2007, 2008, and they think, well, if my home values could drop that fast, if my pensions could shrink that drastically, then maybe I'm not as secure as I thought I was, and I can't trust not only the institutions of the private sector, but also government to look out for me. And that makes people concerned.

And people are deeply concerned about inequality in the sense that the system is rigged against ordinary folks. And they're not wrong that lobbyists and narrow special interests have disproportionate influence in Congress, and that big money and unaccountable, undisclosed money is distorting our politics in ways that are going to be damaging over the long term.

And that disquiet, that concern is expressing itself in the Republican Party as well as the Democratic Party. And we have to listen to that, and we have to pay attention to that and be mindful of it. Because when people are scared, then strange things can happen in politics. When people are nervous and feel threatened, then we can get a politics that is not about bringing people together, but is about "us" and "them," and looking for somebody to blame.

And part of my speech in the State of the Union was to address that and remind us that this country never moves forward when it's based on "us" and "them." It moves forward when it's based on us, period. We the people. And if there's one thing that I've said I regret—and I continue to insist upon this—that the rancor and the meanness and the schoolyard taunts of our current political climate have gotten worse, not better, during the course of my Presidency.

*Audience member.* Not your fault.

*The President.* Well, you know, I'm the President, so—it's not a matter of fault, it's a matter of responsibility, and it's a matter of how do we make it better. And that's why I've been talking about this.

But for you, all of you as Democrats, I just want to repeat something that I said yesterday. I am a proud progressive Democrat. And I believe that we have obligations to the poor and the vulnerable. I believe in fighting discrimination in every walk of life. I believe that the economy grows faster when everybody gets a fair shot, not just the few. I believe that everybody should have health care in a country as wealthy as ours and that every child should get a decent education. And I believe that when it comes to our foreign policy, we should be tough and smart and defend ourselves against any possible threat, but that diplomacy matters too and that we should never rush to war.

So there are a core set of values and principles that have guided me. But I also believe that as we fight for those principles, we have to understand this is a big country with a lot of points of view. And if I were having this same conversation in some other States in some other communities, they might disagree with me on just about everything I say, and yet they love this country just as much as we do. They are just as committed to making sure their kids have a good future as we do.

And so we can argue hard, and we can push back against some of the policies that they're promoting that I think would be extraordinarily damaging to the country, and we can do that while still insisting that there's room for common ground and there's a possibility for compromise when possible, and by the way, that change in this country—powerful change—never happens in one fell swoop, but it is a process of us diligently pushing every step of the way to move the country in a better direction.

That's how Social Security got started. It was a small program, excluded a lot of people. African Americans oftentimes couldn't benefit. A lot of the benefits themselves were meager. And yet it became one of the cornerstones in lifting entire generations of senior citizens out of poverty. That's how Medicaid got started. Every significant social advance we've made, it's taken years of stick-to-itness, and fight.

And so, more than anything, that's what I want to leave all of you with: the sense that this is not a one-shot deal. This never was. When I first appeared way back when, Steve, here in this house, and when I first announced that I was running for President, I always remind people I didn't say, "Yes, I can," I said, "Yes, we can." And when I talked about change we can believe in, I didn't say "Change we can believe in next week." [*Laughter*]

What I tried to describe was a process whereby we as citizens engaged in the hard, often frustrating work of self-governance. And if we were committed to that process, if we did it the right way, then things would get better. That's what's happened. And that's what we have to continue. And so my hope is, is that all of you are just as engaged, feel just as great a sense of urgency today as you did back in 2008. I want us to see just as much progress 8 years from now as we have made over the last 8 years.

We've got outstanding candidates who share our values. And we've got opponents on the other side who may not share our prescriptive beliefs, may be wrong on a whole host of issues, but who are fellow Americans, and we have to take into account how we end up winning the elections and ultimately governing.

And I'm confident we can do that. And the reason I'm confident is because of you. I've seen what you've accomplished. I've seen the support that you've provided. I see the young people like Christie and Matthew and Malia and Sasha. And this next generation is just full of remarkable life and ideas, and they know what's right and what's wrong. And they know to treat people fairly, regardless of what they look like, or where they come from, or who they love. And we're going to be in good hands as they move into leadership. But we've got to pave the way for them. That's our job. And I know you all are up to it.

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:20 p.m. at the residence of Steve Westly and Anita Yu. In his remarks, he referred to Matthew and Christina Westly, children of Mr. Westly and Ms. Yu; and Henry R. Muñoz III, national finance committee chair, Democratic National Committee. He

also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Democratic National Committee fundraisers :: Atherton, CA, reception.

*Locations:* Atherton, CA.

*Names:* Muñoz, Henry R., III; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Pelosi, Nancy; Westly, Christina; Westly, Matthew; Westly, Steve; Yu, Anita.

*Subjects:* Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; California : Democratic Party events; California : President's visits; Congress : House of Representatives :: Minority Leader; Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Improvement; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Elections : 2016 Presidential and congressional elections; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: Promotion efforts; Energy : Carbon dioxide emissions, reduction; Energy : Domestic sources; Energy : Greenhouse gas emissions, regulation; Environment : Climate change; Environment : Paris Agreement; Environmental Protection Agency; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Iran : Nuclear program, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action; Iraq : U.S. and coalition forces, withdrawal.

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