

Remarks at a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Dinner in Minneapolis
October 23, 2010

Thank you. Everybody, please have a seat, have a seat. You're going to make me blush. [Laughter] I am thrilled to see all of you here today. And let me, first of all, say that Minnesota has one of the finest congressional delegations of any in the country. I am grateful to your two wonderful Senators who I've gotten a chance to know over the last several years: Amy Klobuchar, who I served with—hey, Amy, how are you? And Al Franken, who we were very happy to see arrive in Washington. The outstanding Members of the House—Keith Ellison, Betty McCollum, Jim Oberstar, and Tim Walz—all who are here; we're thrilled to have them.

The great congressional candidates who are with us here today, we are proud of you. And Mark Dayton, who I had a chance to serve with as Senator. He was dedicated, he had a heart as big as this room, and he is going to be just an outstanding Governor for this State. So we are proud of you.

And what can I say about Nancy Pelosi, who will go down in history as one of the finest Speakers in the history of the United States of America? She is—Nancy is just so elegant and beautiful, and people just don't realize she is tough. [Laughter] She is tough. And she has to be tough, because we are in a very difficult political cycle.

And so I just want to give you a sense of—oh, I'm sorry, I didn't know you were here—a guy who has his own tough job—Chris Van Hollen, the head of the DCCC, who's doing great work each and every day. Almost missed Chris. Chris is working like a dog, so I want to make sure everybody knows what wonderful work he's doing.

Chris will tell you this is a difficult political environment we're in right now. And it's because we've gone through as tough a couple of years as this country has ever seen, certainly the toughest couple years since the 1930s. And Nancy alluded to it, but just to give people a sense of perspective here: We lost 4 million jobs in the 6 months before I was sworn in, 4 million

jobs in the 6 months before I was sworn in. We lost 750,000 jobs the month I was sworn in, 600,000 the month after that, 600,000 the month after that. Almost all of the 8 million jobs that would ultimately be lost during this recession were lost before any of the Democrats' economic policies were able to be put into place. Before the Recovery Act could really take root, before some of the other steps that we took in terms of small-business loans, tax cuts, could take seed.

And so we saw a massive hole. And that in and of itself would be sufficient to make this a difficult political environment, but what makes it worse is that crisis was really a culmination of what some have called the lost decade. Between 2001 and 2009, we had the slowest job growth in any time since World War II. Between 2001 and 2009, we actually saw the middle class lose 5 percent of their income—5 percent of their income. This is at a time when the costs of health care, the costs of a college education were all skyrocketing. People were watching manufacturing ship out to other countries.

And so you had a sense already, before the crisis on Wall Street, that we had not prepared ourselves for the future; that we had left too many challenges untended to; that our politics in Washington had become simply a mechanism for special interests to advance their narrow causes, but that we had lost the capacity to do big things and to finally tackle some of those structural issues that were impeding us from creating the kind of future that we want for our children and our grandchildren.

So we had a big job when we first came in. And our first job was obviously to stop the bleeding, and we did that. An economy that was shrinking is now growing again. An economy that was shedding hundreds of thousands of jobs every month, we've now seen 9 months of consecutive job growth in the public sector—in the private sector. That's in addition to all the jobs that we've saved for teachers and firefighters and social workers and police

officers here in Minnesota and all across the country.

And so the good news is, is that we've been able to stabilize the economy. The bad news is, is that we're nowhere near done. We've got so much more work to do. There are still millions of people out of work who are desperate and just hanging on by a thread. There are hundreds of thousands of folks who are concerned about losing their homes. People are scared. People are nervous.

And that's why the tactics that were deployed by the other side, at the beginning of my Presidency, are so frustrating to so many of us, those of us who deeply care about the future of this country. Because their basic strategy was, boy, we made such a big mess that rather than take responsibility for it—which most of us would have hoped was going to happen, right? Our thinking was we're going to come in, and even though the other folks caused it, we're going to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. We're not going to play politics. We're not going to point fingers. We're going to roll up our sleeves and start getting to work, because although we are proud Democrats, we are prouder to be Americans. That was our hope and expectation.

And instead, the other side made a tactical decision which was, this is such a mess, it's probably going to take several years to solve. And so we're better off sitting on the sidelines saying no to everything, obstructing every possible bit of progress that could be made, so that we are well positioned by the time the next election rolls around to simply point our fingers and say the Democrats are to blame.

In other words, their political strategy was based on amnesia—[laughter]—based on the premise that people would not remember that they were the folks who were responsible for the devastation to our economy.

Now, we made a different decision. And because of the Members of Congress who are in this room, because of the leadership of Nancy Pelosi, because of the leadership of Harry Reid in the Senate, we didn't think about the next election, we thought about the next generation. And we also decided, even as we were going to

solve the immediate crisis, that it was time once and for all for us to tackle the big issues that were holding us back as a country.

And so we started off with education. We've seen a transformation of our education agenda. Not only did we save the jobs of teachers, but we also instituted a reform agenda that now has States all across the country raising standards, training teachers more effectively, going out there each and every day and finding out what are the best practices that can ensure that our kids can learn and compete in the 21st century. And that's K–12.

And then we said, that's not enough. We've got to make sure that every young person in America is prepared for college and then can afford to go to college. So we took tens of billions of dollars that were going to the banks in unwarranted subsidies, and we shifted those to our student loan programs and our Pell grant programs. And we've got millions of young people all across the country who are now able to afford college because of the steps that these courageous Members of Congress were willing to take during the course of this year.

That's on education. We took on health care. And obviously, health care is something that's been debated a lot. It's going to be very interesting, now that the other side says their main agenda is repealing health care. What exactly do they want to repeal? Do they want to repeal us saying to 30 million people, you now finally have affordable health care? Are they just going to say, you know what, tough luck, you're on your own? Are they going to want to repeal provisions that say young people can stay on their parents' health insurance until they're 26 years old if they can't get health insurance on the job? Do they want to repeal us closing the doughnut hole so that senior citizens can afford their prescription drugs when they get sick and don't have to choose between groceries and their medicine?

Are they going to want to repeal what essentially was the most robust patient bill of rights in our history that says to insurance companies, you can't drop coverage for people when they get sick, you can't preclude them from getting health insurance when they've got a preexisting

condition, you can't impose arbitrary lifetime limits that leave people bankrupt even though they've been paying premiums all their lives?

What exactly are you going to repeal? And are you going to repeal all the mechanisms that Nancy alluded to, to lower the costs and improve the quality of care so that the Congressional Budget Office says we will actually save over a trillion dollars in deficits as a consequence of this program?

It's going to be an interesting exercise if they think that they can follow through on that, because the American people may have heard a lot of arguments on Capitol Hill, but when they see what actually is being delivered I don't think the Republicans are going to feel so good about this repeal call.

But the reason they're moving forward on it is because they're being driven by the special interests who have been paying for their campaigns over the course of the last several months.

The same is true on Wall Street reform. We said that we've got to have a financial system that is vibrant and dynamic, but also a financial system that has basic rules of the road, that works for everybody, not just for some. So we made sure that credit card companies can't jack up your interest rates arbitrarily, without notice. We made certain that mortgage brokers can't steer you to more expensive interest rate mortgages. We made sure that we got systems in place to guard against the kind of structural breakdowns that resulted in the taxpayer bailouts that all of us find unacceptable.

And now you've got folks on the other side who have said one of their first agenda items is to try to repeal Wall Street reform. Think about this. This is in the wake of the worst financial crisis since the 1930s, and they want to go back to the status quo, business as usual.

Across the board—energy, education, health care, our financial systems, consumer protections—their basic agenda is, we're going to do the things exactly as we were doing them before President Obama got into office. And that's an agenda that America simply can't afford. It is an agenda that folks simply can't afford.

We were at a rally right before we came here, and I've been using this analogy around the country. They drove this economy into a ditch. And Nancy and I, we've had to put our boots on—[laughter]—and the rest of the congressional delegation, we had to rappel down into the ditch, and we're trying to push to get that car out of there. And the Republicans are just standing on the sidelines watching us, fanning themselves, sipping on a Slurpee. [Laughter]. They're kicking dirt back into the ditch. [Laughter] We're getting it into our eyes. Didn't lift a finger to help. All they did was point and say, you're not pushing hard enough; you're not doing it the right way.

We finally have gotten this car out of the ditch, and it's taken a lot of effort. And yes, the car is banged up; it is dented, it is in need of some bodywork and a tuneup, but it's moving in the right direction. We're about to go forward.

And suddenly, we get this tap on our fingers, and we look back, and it's the Republicans asking for the keys back. And our basic attitude is, no, you can't have the keys back. You don't know how to drive. [Laughter] You don't know how to drive.

Now, I want to be clear, they are more than happy to join us for the ride, but they've got to sit in the backseat, because we want America's families in the front seat. We want them in shotgun, not special interests, not the folks who've been calling the shots in the past.

That's the challenge that we face. Because, look, every Democrat who is here—Al, Nancy, Chris, Tim, Keith, Betty, Jim—every—Amy—what binds us together as Democrats is a shared vision about what America is. We believe in hard work and responsibility and individual initiative. We know government can't solve every problem. We understand that government needs to be lean and efficient. Nobody here wants to waste taxpayer dollars.

In fact, one of our most important agendas is restoring people's confidence that, in fact, government in a serious way can do what it's supposed to be doing, nothing more, nothing less. But we also believe that part of being an American is, is that we look out for one another; that I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper;

that we are willing to invest not just in the here and now, but in the future; that we're investing in our kids' education, we're investing in our workers' skills; that we're investing in our infrastructure.

And frankly, that's not what we've been doing for a very long time. And that's part of the change in mindset that we've been undergoing over the last couple of years. We've got to be thinking about the next generation.

In the words of Abraham Lincoln, we believe that every individual should be able to do what they do best for themselves, but we also believe that government should be able to do what people can't do for themselves as well as government can do. And there are some basic things that we include in that

Right now the Republican agenda, what they call the promise for America, they want to cut education spending by 20 percent in order to pay for \$700 billion worth of tax cuts that would only go to the top 2 percent. We don't have the \$700 billion. We'd have to borrow from China to pay for it, and in part to pay for a tiny amount of that tax cut they would cut education by 20 percent.

Do you think China is cutting education by 20 percent right now? Do you think South Korea or Germany or India are cutting education spending by 20 percent? It makes no sense.

We want to restart rebuilding our infrastructure and putting people back to work right now. Yes, we've saved 3.5 million jobs. We've got a whole bunch more jobs that we could create out there, putting people to work doing the work that needs to be done. Anybody who's been to Beijing or Singapore, and you walk through their airports and you say, America used to have the best infrastructure. We used to have the best airports; we used to have the best roads, the best bridges. And now we're investing less than half of what Europe or Asia are investing in their infrastructure.

Where is that going to leave our children and our grandchildren 10 years from now, 20 years from now, 50 years from now? Why aren't the best railway lines, the best high-speed rails, the best broadband lines here in the United States of America?

We've got a race to see who's going to determine the clean energy future. And one of the things we did in the Recovery Act was invest in solar panels and wind turbines and advanced battery manufacturing here in the United States of America. I want those things made here. But right now we're getting our clock cleaned because we have not been serious about making those investments. And we haven't set the guideposts where private capital could come in and start making those investments. And that means losing that race. That's not acceptable.

And so we've got a lot of work to do. And as much progress as we've made over the last 2 years, the only way we're going to continue on that progress is if each and every one of you are out there talking to your friends and your neighbors, knocking on doors, making phone calls—yes, writing checks to these outstanding Members of Congress—because I've got to have a partner. I've got to have folks working with me who are willing to put aside their short-term political interests when it comes to the interests of the country.

And so let me just leave you with this thought. I know that because this has been a tough couple of years, I've had people come back—come up to me sometimes and say, gosh, when you were elected in 2008, that was so exciting. Election night was just unbelievable, and then Inauguration Day, you had Beyonce singing and—[laughter]—Bono. And I was at the Inauguration, and it was just so inspiring. And I've got to admit, Mr. President, sometimes over the last couple of years, with all the negative ads and all the money that's been pouring in, all the filibustering and obstruction in Congress, sometimes, I just start losing altitude, start losing hope. It just seems like change is so hard to bring about.

And I've got to remind people, first of all, I warned you it was going to be hard. I never said it was going to be easy. If it was easy, it would have already been done. We knew it was going to be hard. But what I also tell people is, don't let anybody tell you that what we've been fighting for hasn't made this country better, hasn't been worth it.

Because of the work that these Members of Congress did, because of the support that you've provided them, there are people right here in Minnesota who are able to get coverage for their cancer treatments instead of having to sell their house. Right now, today. Because of what you did, there are small businesses that are open right now that otherwise would have shuttered their doors.

Because of what you did, there are parents here in Minnesota who are able to look their kids in the eye and say, you know what, even though our savings got blasted by the economic downturn and the fall in the stock market, despite all that we can guarantee that you're going to go to college.

Because of what you did, there are 100,000 young men and women who've come home from Iraq, no longer involved in that combat mission. And because of what you did, when those 100,000 come home, they're getting the treatment they need, they're getting the benefits that they deserve. They got a post-9/11 GI bill that they can count on so that they can be part of this latest and greatest generation and help grow and expand and build our middle class.

Those are all the consequences of the work that you did. And so yes, things don't happen as quickly as we want; they're not always as smooth as people would want. This is a big, messy democracy. That's the nature of America. It's always been that way. This Nation was founded on hard. A revolution of Thirteen Colonies breaking away from the greatest empire on

Earth, that was hard. It was hard to free the slaves and ensure that we weren't living half free and half slave. It was hard for all those immigrants, our grandparents and great-grandparents and great-great-grandparents, to come here and try to carve out a life for themselves. It was hard to overcome war and depression. And it was hard to fight for civil rights and women's rights and workers' rights.

But they did it because they understood that in America, when citizens join together and decide they've got a vision for the future; when they decide our destiny is not written for us, it is written by us; when they made that decision, we can't be stopped. And that's what this election is about: whether we continue with that trajectory, whether we continue with that tradition.

I'm absolutely confident we can. So I want everybody here to understand that we're just in the first quarter. We're just starting. We've got a lot more work to do. And the only way we're going to be able to do it is if each and every one of you had that same spirit of possibility, are undaunted in the face of uncertainty, are unafraid in the face of difficulty. If you will join with us, I promise you we will look back on this period and we will say, yes, we were tested, but we met that test for future generations.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:35 p.m. at Van Dusen Mansion. In his remarks, he referred to musicians Beyonce G. Knowles and Paul D. "Bono" Hewson.

Remarks at American Cord & Webbing Co., Inc., in Woonsocket, Rhode Island

October 25, 2010

Thanks so much. Please, everybody have a seat. It is just wonderful to be at American Cord and Webbing. And thank you. I just saw all the great work that's being done here. I want to acknowledge a few friends here in the first row. First of all, your outstanding senior Senator, Jack Reed; we're so proud of him. And your equally outstanding junior Senator, Sheldon

Whitehouse, is here; we got my dear friend Congressman Patrick Kennedy. And I want to just say, right now Providence Mayor Dave Cicilline—soon could have another job. Congressman Jim Langevin is just a great friend and an inspiration to all of us. We've got Woonsocket mayor, Leo Fontaine is here. Where's Mr. Mayor? There he is, right there. And of course,