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The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

April 04, 2013

Remarks by the President at a DCCC Event -- San Francisco, CA

Private Residence
San Francisco, California

8:24 P.M. PDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. (Applause.) Well, first of all, let me thank Ann and Gordon for once again extending such gracious hospitality to all of us. I was reminded that I was first here in 2008, when I was running the first time, and I had much less gray hair. (Laughter.) But they were kind to me then and have been kind to me since, and I appreciate very much their friendship and support.

I want to acknowledge Steve Israel, who is here and has an often thankless, extraordinarily difficult but critically important job, and he's done so with good humor and boundless energy. And so please give Congressman Steve Israel a big round of applause. (Applause.)

And of course I'm here because your neighbor told me I needed to be here. (Laughter.) And I am here because there are very few people in public office who I am more fond of and respectful than the person who just introduced me, Nancy Pelosi. She is thoughtful, she's visionary, she's as tough as nails. (Laughter.) She is practical. She never lets ideology cloud her judgment. She's constantly motivated by how do we create a country that is more just, more fair, more dynamic. She knows why she's in public life. It's connected to her values -- the values that she grew up with, the values that she's raised her kids, and now spoils her grandkids with. (Laughter.) And I'm just so proud to call her a friend.

And I am here because I won my last election, but I'm here because my job is not simply to occupy the Oval Office. My job is to make sure we move the country forward, and I think we can best do that if Nancy Pelosi is Speaker of the House once again. (Applause.)

Nancy used a word that I've spent a lot of time thinking about these days. And that's the word "citizenship." I talked about it at the inauguration speech. I talked about it at the State of the Union speech. I actually talked about it at the convention, my acceptance speech. And the reason I care about the word so much is because there are times in today's busy world, the media chatter, where there's a government over here somewhere, and then there's people and ordinary life and the private sector, and all that stuff is over there. And somehow the notion is that these two things are separate.

And some of the folks who most adamantly insist that government is something alien and distant are the same folks who claim the mantle of the Founders and believe that their views best represent the original intentions of those who fought for and formed this country.

And yet, when I read the Declaration of Independence, when I read the Constitution, when I look at all the great documents and laws that have been passed that built this country up, what I see is this central idea that citizenship means we are the government -- the government of and by and for the people -- which means we have responsibilities that extend beyond voting or even writing a check.

It speaks to rights, but it also speaks to responsibilities and obligations. It suggests that we are responsible for ourselves, and our families, and our neighborhoods, and our cities, and our farmlands, and our neighbors, and our nation, and future generations. And so we don't just think about "us," we think about "we, the people." That's the idea that motivated me to get into public service in the first place. That's what I think has always been at the heart of America.

And the reason that we've been able to make significant progress over the last four years and couple months is because a lot of you have believed it, too. That's how I got elected in 2008. That's how Nancy Pelosi became Speaker in 2006. That's the reason that we were able to yank an economy on the verge of depression and get it back on track to growth and job creation. That's the reason that we were able to pass a health care law that is already helping millions of people, and will help millions more when it is fully implemented next year. (Applause.) That's the reason we've been able to put people back to work building roads and bridges and water systems and new park trails all across this country. That's the reason that we were able to double fuel efficiency standards on cars, begin the process of reducing carbons and making our economy more energy-efficient, and doubling the amount of clean energy that we're producing through wind and solar and other renewables. It's the reason that we've been able slowly to nurse the housing market back to health. That is the reason that we've been able to keep this country safe while still being true to our values and principles of rule of law.

That is the reason why we've been able to help millions of kids all across this country go to college who couldn't otherwise afford it. We've started to reform schools at the K-12 level.

We were able to do all this because you believed in citizenship. And the reason I ran for another term was because I think we've got more work to do. And the reason that Nancy wants to be Speaker again is because she thinks we have more work to do. (Applause.) I assure you that she does not like being away from her grandkids. (Laughter.) She could be doing a lot of other stuff. Steve makes enormous sacrifices. He's got to travel all across the country raising money constantly and recruiting candidates. He'd love to be home. But we think we've got more work to do.

Now, this year, we have a window. Just completed one election. We would like to see some governing done in Washington before the next election starts. (Laughter.) And so we've got this opportunity that we need to seize to initiate serious gun safety legislation, reduce gun violence -- (applause) -- to make sure that we finally get a comprehensive immigration reform done, because we are a nation of laws but we are also a nation of immigrants, and those two things are not incompatible. (Applause.)

We have more work to do to make sure that we stabilize our finances in a way that still allows us to make investments in critical infrastructure and basic research. Somebody mentioned to me they heard my speech about the new BRAIN Initiative that we've put forward; just an entire sweeping horizon of possibilities when it comes to -- (applause) -- curing Alzheimer's, and curing Parkinson's, and so many diseases, but also just allowing us to do things that we couldn't even imagine a year ago, two years ago. Now we're on the threshold of cracking a code that could open up endless possibilities.

Now, in order to do that, we've got to be able to pass laws. There are some things I can do administratively, a lot of stuff that we can do administratively, but a lot of stuff we've got to do legislatively. Right now we're constrained by what we get done. And I have said publicly and I will say it to this room once again that I believe that Republicans love their kids and their country as much as we do, and there are a whole bunch of folks out there who I believe actually want to cooperate with us but feel constrained right now because of their own politics.

I'm looking and probing for every crack and possible opportunity to join in a bipartisan fashion to solve these problems, because I think most of the problems out there are ones that, at least historically, have garnered support from Democrats and Republicans, and that's -- there is nothing inherently Democratic about building roads or funding research or looking out for the environment. It used to be a great bipartisan set of ideas.

And so my hope is, is that we can get some governing done this year, and I know that Nancy feels the same way. By the way, she's already worked with her caucus to deliver votes on things that aren't necessarily politically advantageous but are the right thing to do. She did it as Speaker, and she's done it as Democratic Leader in the House. So we want to get this -- we just want to get stuff done.

And I won't say -- I won't speak for Nancy here, I will speak for myself. I would love nothing better than an effective, loyal opposition that is willing to meet us halfway and move the country forward -- because that's what the American people are looking for. The economy is growing but there is still a lot of folks out there who are struggling; still way too many people who are unemployed; people who haven't seen a raise in a decade; people whose homes are still underwater; people who when they see \$4-a-gallon gas know that that is money that's coming straight out of their pockets or their retirement funds and is going to be very hard to make up. And they're hoping that we can do some governing. And that's what I intend to do this year, and the year after that and the year after that.

But I would be dishonest if I didn't say that it would be a whole lot easier to govern if I had Nancy Pelosi as Speaker. (Laughter and applause.) Because here are the stakes -- I actually think we've got a great chance of getting immigration reform done. I think we have a good chance of getting serious gun safety legislation done. But

if we're going to move forward on some of the other things I talked about in the State of the Union -- making sure that we've got early childhood education for every child in America so that they can (inaudible.) (Applause.)

If we're going to deal with the \$2 trillion of deferred maintenance we've got in terms of infrastructure -- not just roads and bridges, but a smart grid that can connect up clean energy to our cities and make sure that we continue to reduce not only existing loads of renewable energy, but also discovering those breakthroughs that are going to make all the difference down the future, then I'm going to need some more help in Congress.

If we're going to deal with climate change in a serious way, then we've got to have folks in Congress -- even when it's not politically convenient -- to talk about it and advocate for it, and break out of this notion that somehow there's a contradiction between us being good stewards of the environment and us growing this economy. They are not a contradiction. We can grow this economy fast and faster if we are seizing the opportunities of the future and not just looking at the energy sources of the past. We're going to need some help.

I'm going to need some help if we are going to continue to make progress in assuring that every young person in this country has a chance to go to college and that they can afford it. I'm going to need some help if we're going to make sure that simple stuff -- what should be simple -- that everybody in America right now can refinance their homes. We could put \$3,000 a year into the pockets of every single American just by passing a law in Congress that, by the way, Mitt Romney's key economic advisor, chief economic advisor says was a good idea. For some reason, we still can't get it through the Congress -- 3,000 bucks. It's like free money for families who right now are struggling. Think about what they could do with it, and what that will do in terms of boosting our growth. I need some help.

And my hope is, is that we're going to see more and more Republicans who say, you know what, I didn't come here just to fight the President or demonize Nancy Pelosi, I came here to get some stuff done. And they will be greeted with great enthusiasm by me and I think by Nancy, if we could get some more stuff done right now. But, realistically, I could get a whole lot more done if Nancy Pelosi is Speaker of the House. (Applause.)

So let me just close by saying this. And I know that Nancy's people will have a chance to answer some more specific questions about their game plan, all the great candidates they've recruited, the significant financial burden that will have to be bent in order to help elect these candidates.

But let me close by saying this, go back to where I started this notion of citizenship. People ask me, does it feel different now in your second term than it did in your first? It does. Look, I would hope I'm better at my job now than I was when I first came in. I've got some nicks, bruises to prove that I've been to this rodeo before. Hopefully, I'm making better decisions and our team is better organized, and we know what works and what doesn't, what some of the pitfalls are.

But the main difference really is a sense of perspective and realization that nothing worthwhile happens in six months or a year. It happens over decades. It happens over generations, that the story of America has been us steadily, through fits and starts, expanding opportunity, creating a more perfect union, seizing the promise of the future, fighting off some of our own worst impulses. And that any one of us, our job is not to do it by ourselves or get it all done in one year or one term or even necessarily in our lifetimes, but our job is to make sure that we're pressing and pushing so that the whole country, over time, is moving in the right direction.

We did a screening of the Jackie -- there's a new movie about Jackie Robinson called "42," which I usually don't plug movies, but I strongly recommend people take their kids and their grandkids to see this. A lot of people don't necessarily remember the story of Jackie Robinson or if they it's sort of vague. His widow, Rachel Robinson was there. She's 90 years old and gorgeous. And in the theater at the White House, I thanked her. I thanked the people who made the film, just for reminding me in very visceral terms that in her lifetime, she saw her husband being the first African American to play in Major League Baseball, and now she's sitting there with me, in the White House. That's a long time -- 70 years. On the other hand, that's a blink of an eye in terms of human history. And that required Branch Rickey, it required Jackie Robinson, and then it required --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Chandler. The commissioner, Happy Chandler.

THE PRESIDENT: -- and it just -- it required a succession of people making tough choices, but the right choice. And then slowly things changed. A culture transformed itself.

I was just in another house here in, very close by. A wonderful young woman, singer-songwriter Brandi Carlile was performing. And she was with her wife -- just got married I guess the day that I announced that I supported same-sex marriage. And she's a young woman, and I'm assuming she's thinking about all the people who were fighting the good fight not just in Stonewall, but well before that.

And so generation after generation, we just plug away, and sometimes we make progress and sometimes it feels like we're not making progress. We just stay at it and stay at it. And then suddenly there's a breakthrough, and the entire culture shifts.

And that's what citizenship means. That's why it's so important, because it's not going to happen all at once. And all of us have to carry the burden of moving things forward.

So I hope that when you hear from Nancy and Steve, I hope that all of you understand this is not just a one-off, this is not just checking this off the list. You've got to stay with them. And it'll be frustrating, it'll be slow, and there will be times where you lose hope, and there will be times where you won't be mad at Nancy, but there will certainly be times where you're mad at me. (Laughter.)

But if you stay with it, if you and your neighbors and your friends and your children and your grandchildren, if they maintain that sense that this is our government not somebody else's, and we can change it, then I've got great optimism for the future of this country and for the future of citizens in America.

Thank you very much, everybody. (Applause.)

END
8:48 P.M. PDT

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