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The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

April 04, 2013

Remarks by the President at a DNC Event -- Atherton, CA

Private Residence
Atherton, California

12:12 P.M. PDT

THE PRESIDENT: Hello, everybody! (Applause.) It is good to be back in California.

AUDIENCE: It's good to have you! (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Somebody said -- somebody told me, they were in the photo line, they said, we're glad you could join our state. (Laughter.) They made it sound like a health club or something. (Laughter.) But I appreciate that you allowed me to join -- (laughter) -- because it is obviously a spectacular place and we've got so many good friends here, and some of you I see out there worked tirelessly dating back to when people could not pronounce my name. (Laughter.) And so I'm grateful to all of you.

First of all, though, I want to give a special acknowledgement to John and Marcia for the incredible job they've done and their great hospitality. Thank you so much. (Applause.) And I must say that if you had a cute baby competition, their granddaughter would have to be an entry. (Laughter.) And I got to say, I might have to pick her, because she is adorable and did not drool on my suit when I grabbed her. (Laughter.) So I'm grateful. I'm grateful to her for that.

We've got some elected officials who are doing incredible work -- great friends. First of all, somebody who works tirelessly on behalf of California every day, but also works on behalf of working people and makes sure that we've got a more inclusive America -- a good friend of mine, somebody who you guys should be very proud of, Congressman Mike Honda is here. Where is Mike? (Applause.) He is around here somewhere. There he is. Yes, I mean, he's not like a real tall guy, but he's a great guy. (Laughter.)

Second of all, you have to be careful to, first of all, say she is brilliant and she is dedicated and she is tough, and she is exactly what you'd want in anybody who is administering the law, and making sure that everybody is getting a fair shake. She also happens to be by far the best-looking attorney general in the country -- Kamala Harris is here. (Applause.) It's true. Come on. (Laughter.) And she is a great friend and has just been a great supporter for many, many years.

And, finally, somebody who is not yet probably as well known on the national scene but is certainly well known in all of us who worked on my campaign this last time out. He did incredible work, could not have been more effective, and has now taken on what can sometimes be a thankless job of being the DNC finance chair -- Henry Muñoz is here. Can everybody please give Henry Muñoz a big round of applause. (Applause.)

So my election is over and you thought you wouldn't have to see me again at these fundraisers. (Laughter.) And a close friend of mine, Abner Mikva, who was White House counsel -- he was a long-time congressman from the

Chicago area -- he used to say that being friends with a politician is like perpetually having a child in college. (Laughter.) It's like every few months you have to write this check and you're thinking when is it going to be over. With elected officials, it's never over.

But the reason I'm here is not for me. The reason I'm here is because the country still needs you. We have, as John indicated, done some work that I'm very, very proud of over the last four years. We took an economy that was about to go into a great depression and we were able to yank it out and put us back on a path towards growth and putting people back to work. We were able to make sure that in the process we rebuilt roads and bridges and a smarter infrastructure all across the country; and invested in clean energy; and made sure that schools got the kinds of Internet connections that they needed; and invested in basic science and research -- all of which will pay dividends for years and years to come.

We said that in a country as wealthy as ours, nobody should go bankrupt just because they got sick. And, already, millions of people are benefiting from the Affordable Care Act. And, by next year, we will know that millions of people all across the country who previously did not have health insurance will have it, including folks with preexisting conditions, which will make everybody a little bit more secure. (Applause.)

We expanded access to college by expanding our student loan programs. We are in the process of reforming our schools to make sure that every child gets a fair shot in life. We ended "don't ask, don't tell" -- laying the groundwork to make sure that this was a country where you were treated fairly and equally no matter who you love. (Applause.)

We expanded national service. We doubled fuel efficiency on cars. We doubled the production of wind and solar energy. We made sure that the Violence Against Women Act was reauthorized and that it provided even greater protection for women all across this country. (Applause.) We ended one war, as promised. We're in the process of ending another, and at the same time have been able to keep the American people safe. And so I'm very proud of the work that we've done. But we've got a lot more work to do. We all know that. This country is the greatest nation on Earth, but it can be even greater. And my main message here today is that America's greatness will not result simply from who you elect to office; it's going to depend on you, as citizens, and how badly you want it.

During the State of the Union speech, as well as my inauguration speech, I talked about citizenship. And this is a word that I spend a lot of time thinking about these days, partly because my background, my orientation, I came into politics believing that politics works best when people are involved. I've never believed that more than I do now, in my second term as President, that the idea of citizenship is not just that you vote, it's not just that you write a check where you can to support a candidate. It's this notion, fundamental to who we are, that we have responsibilities to ourselves and our families, but we also have obligations to our neighborhood, our community, our cities, our states, and ultimately the nation and the next generation.

And the only way that this country moves forward is when we, the people, collectively, make it our business to meet the challenges of our time. And we know what those challenges are. And we know we've got to do better.

Now, in the next couple of months, we've got the opportunity to make some very significant changes. Number one, I believe that we can get comprehensive immigration reform passed -- (applause) -- and that is going to mean that America can continue to be a nation of laws, but also a nation of immigrants, and attract the best and the brightest from all around the world. And if we push hard and we stay focused, we've got the opportunity to get this done over the next couple of months.

I believe that we have a chance to, after 30 years, frankly, of doing almost nothing, to reduce gun violence in our society. (Applause.) And it's going to be hard, it's going to be tough, but I think we've got a chance to get some stuff done on that.

Now, one of the things that I want to be very clear on is that this year, next year, and for the next four years that I'm in office, I am always going to be seeking, wherever I can, bipartisan solutions. And I intend to continue to reach out to Republicans because I genuinely believe that the politics that you see in Washington isn't representative of America; that most people actually have common sense, and most folks think cooperation and occasional compromise is part of life. And I also think that we have to govern, not simply politick.

And so, whether it's on immigration reform or the budget or any of these issues, I will continue to do everything I can to reach out to my friends on the other side of the aisle. And look, I believe that they love their kids and this country just as much as we do, and although we may have some very fundamental disagreements about how to get there, I don't think we've got a disagreement about what we need to be as a nation.

Having said that, though, there are still some really big arguments that we're having in Washington, and I believe that Democrats represent those values that will best advance the interests of middle-class families and everybody who is willing to work hard to get into the middle class; that will grow this economy in a broad-based way, and that will lay the foundation for prosperity for generations to come.

And you believe that, too. That's why you're here. In order for us to do that, you're going to have to stay involved. Think about some of the things I spoke about during the State of the Union address: making sure that every child in America has outstanding, high-quality, early childhood education. We know that there's nothing more important to a child's success than those early years. And if we do that right, not only are we going to see better performance in our schools, we're going to see better performance in our economy. And we can do it. We can afford to do it.

But in order for us to make that happen, we're going to have to have an active, motivated, Democratic national party. People here in this area care deeply about issues of energy and climate change. And I think that the science is indisputable, and this is an obligation we owe to future generations. And as I said, we've already done a lot to reduce our carbon footprint and to make our economy more energy efficient. But if we're going to do more, then we've got to make sure that we're active and involved, and helping to educate our friends and our neighbors and our coworkers about why this is important and why there's no contradiction between a sound environment and strong economic growth; that, in fact, if we do this right, the energy sources of the future, the clean energy sources of the future can be an engine for economic growth for decades and decades to come.

When it comes to our economy -- making sure that we're investing in basic research and science. This is the epicenter of innovation in this nation. Some of you saw, a couple of days ago, I announced a new BRAIN Initiative that will allow us to crack the code and map -- (applause) -- what this incredible gray matter between our ears, one of the greatest mysteries there is, what's causing things like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, and to not just provide cures but also to help generate entire new industries that can put people to work in this region and around the country.

In order for us to make sure that we're investing sufficiently in basic science and research, you're going to have to be involved. You have to push. You can't just wait for it to happen, because there are going to be competing interests and folks who want to spend those resources in a different way.

When it comes to our budget, I actually think that we can stabilize our finances, reduce our debt, reduce our deficit in a prudent, balanced way. But we've got the other side insisting that somehow we can cut our way to prosperity. I disagree with that. I will take that case to the American people. But for me to be successful in resolving that argument in a way that allows us to keep growing and keep investing, I'm going to need your help.

Making sure that we're providing ladders of opportunity in communities all across the country that have been left behind -- and, in some cases, have been behind for decades -- so that we're not just investing in education, but also making sure that we're providing transportation assistance and tax credits so that impoverished communities can be part of this global economy. That will make us all stronger. I can't do that unless I have your help.

And for us to continue to make progress so that this is a society that is more just and more equal and more inclusive -- we've made remarkable progress over these last few years, but that's not because of what started in Washington, it's because of what happened in communities all across the country.

I was mentioning to people I had a chance to see an early screening of this new movie called "42"; it's about Jackie Robinson. And I look around the room -- young people -- (laughter) -- kind of vaguely know, yes, Jackie Robinson -- (laughter) -- first African American baseball player. His widow was there, Rachel Robinson, who's gorgeous and 90, but looks better than I do -- (laughter) -- and could not be more gracious.

And to sit there in a movie theater watching what happened in her lifetime, and to know that because of the decisions and courage of Jackie Robison and Branch Rickey, and all the other path breakers, that we now have a country that is fairer and better for it is a reminder of how change happens in this country. It doesn't happen all at once. It doesn't happen in one fell swoop. It doesn't happen because a President gives a speech. It happens because a whole bunch of people out there, day in and day out, are making choices and decisions about whether we're going to be fair or less fair; whether we're going to be generous or less generous; whether we are going to be inclusive or less inclusive. And that changing of our hearts and our minds ultimately translates itself into politics, but it begins with citizens. It begins with you.

And if the Democratic Party stands for anything, then it has to stand for that basic proposition that not only do we want an economy where if you work hard, you can make it if you try -- no matter where you come from, what you look like, who you love -- but also that the way to get there is by giving everybody a voice and making sure everybody is involved and everybody is included. If we stand for anything as Democrats, that's got to be what we stand for.

And so the DNC is an important part of that overall process. And the fact that you are here, the fact that John and Marcia were willing to open up their home like this gives me confidence that, in fact, we will be able to sustain these efforts. And it has to be sustained beyond elections. You can't just wait until a presidential election to do this. It's all those days in between that are going to determine whether or not we bring about the changes that we so desperately believe in.

So to all of you, I want to say thank you. But understand this is just a beginning, it's not an end. You are going to be called on to do more work. You are going to be called on to get more engaged and more involved. And if you

ever have any doubts as to why you're doing it, then you have to look at John and Marcia's grandbaby, or that young man who's falling asleep because I've been talking too long. (Laughter.) And you will remember that, ultimately, the only thing that matters is whether or not we're leaving behind a country that's a little bit better than the one we founded for them. That's why we do what we do. That's why I do what I do -- for Malia and Sasha, and all the Malias and Sashas out there, I want to make sure we're doing right by them.

All right, thank you very much, everybody. (Applause.) God bless you. Thank you.

END
12:31 P.M. PDT

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