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Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

November 07, 2011

Remarks by the President at a Campaign Event

Private Residence  
Washington, D.C.

7:15 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, let me just thank Dwight and Toni for your incredible hospitality. I hope you didn't cut down the tree just for this event. (Laughter.) I'd feel a little guilty about that. It looks like it was a nice, big tree. (Laughter.)

It's wonderful to see all of you. I've got some friends in the room who I've known a very long time; some people who I'm meeting for the first time. But to all of you, I appreciate yourself extending yourselves in this way.

What I want to do is keep my remarks at the top relatively brief, and then I want to spend some time just in a conversation with you and answering some questions and getting your feedback.

We are at a point in our history, as Dwight indicated, that I think is as important, if not more important, than where we were back in 2008. I'm obviously a little grayer than I was then. I've got some bumps and bruises from some tough political battles in this town. But what we've been able to accomplish over the last three years I'm extraordinary proud of.

We were able to prevent America from going into a Great Depression. We were able to, after a series of quarterly GDP reports that were the worst that we've seen since the Great Depression, reverse it and get the economy to grow again. We've seen 20 straight months of consecutive job growth. We were able to pass health insurance reform, Wall Street reform, end "don't ask, don't tell," end the war in Iraq -- the list goes on.

And sometimes when Valerie and I come out of a meeting we have to remind ourselves of some of the stuff we've done because you lose track after three years. And so I'm very proud of our track record. But what is absolutely true is that huge swaths of the country are still hurting. A lot of people are still struggling out there. And there's no way in which America right now is fulfilling all of its potential.

We've got entire communities that have been devastated by this recession. We have young people who are struggling to take advantage of the good educations that they've received but are having trouble finding work. And we've got a whole generation of kids out there who aren't getting the kind of education that they need to compete in the 21st century.

And so as proud as I am of what we've already accomplished, I am that much more determined to make sure that over the next five years we complete the task that we set out, which was to create a government that is responsive to not just people who are hurting now, but also responsive to future generations; that we're able to reduce our deficit in a responsible way, in a balanced way; that we're able to make sure our school system is working for every child and not just some children; that we implement health care reform so that we start reducing costs for families and for businesses and for the federal government, but also improve quality and make sure that nobody out there is going bankrupt just because somebody in their family is getting sick.

We've got to still implement immigration reform -- a big, unfinished piece of business -- because we're a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants, and we should be able to reconcile those two imperatives and make sure that we've got a system that works to grow our economy and improve our economy, and doesn't leave people in a second-class status in this United States of America.

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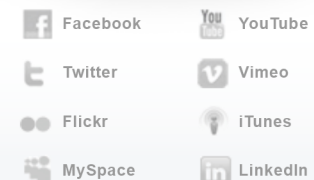
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We still don't have an energy policy that is suitable for the needs of the future. And although we've made enormous progress, I think people forget, for example, that we doubled fuel efficiency standards on cars and trucks just in the last year, which if it had been in legislative form would have probably been the most significant piece of environmental legislation in the last 30 years. A lot of people don't know it. And those gains we still are way too dependent on imported oil, and we still haven't done everything we can to transition to a clean energy economy.

In foreign policy, we're ending the war in Iraq and we're transitioning out of Afghanistan. But I didn't run for office only to end a war or only to make sure that we got bin Laden. We also want to make sure that we're creating opportunity all around the world; that we have a positive, proactive agenda that is helping alleviate poverty and helping to provide education, and helping to make sure that the Arab Spring is one that turns positive and that gives more people opportunity.

So across the board we've just got a lot more work to do. And the only way we're going to be able to accomplish it is if we've got folks like you as energized, as enthusiastic, as committed as so many of you were in 2008. Because what's holding us back right now are not technical questions. I mean, there are some big technical issues surrounding how do you spur on clean energy, how do we make sure that our manufacturing base is strong here in the United States, and we are at the cutting edge of those technologies that are going to help us win the race for the future.

But those are solvable problems. The challenge we have right now is fixing our politics and making sure that we've got the kind of politics and governance here in Washington which is responsive to the needs of people, not the needs of special interests; that brings out the best in us and not the worst in us.

And that is probably the biggest piece of business that remains unfinished. That's probably the area where we've been most stymied over the last three years. My legislative record, our administration record I'll put up against any President in their first term. But in terms of changing the culture in Washington, the fever has not broken yet. Not everybody has gotten the word yet -- (laughter) -- that this is not how the American people want their government to operate.

They want common sense. They want responsiveness. They want a focus on the future and the long term. They want compromise where that's appropriate. But they also want to make sure that their leaders stand on principle where needed and are willing to make the tough calls and do the difficult things that will help us ensure that the America that we pass onto our kids and our grandkids is better than the one that we inherited.

And that I think is the biggest challenge. And over the next year we are going to be wrestling with what are two fundamentally different visions of where we need to take the country and where we need to take our politics. And I'm confident that the American people prefer our vision. But we're going to have to communicate that effectively, and to do that I'm going to need you.

So I just -- as I was thinking about riding over here, I was thinking about a group of veterans that I met with today. We made a big announcement about initiatives that are going to help veterans get hired. The unemployment rate for post-9/11 veterans is actually higher than the general population, and that's something that I intend to fix. But it reminded me of something that Michelle and I have both experienced.

The biggest honor of my job is serving as Commander-in-Chief. And I get the chance to interact a lot with people who are based all around the world; Michelle interacts with military families here, throughout the country. The kind of sacrifices they're making on behalf of their country, the kind of commitment and discipline, and putting country ahead of self-interest, is unbelievable.

And for that same spirit to be captured and to be channeled, and to be the animating spirit of Washington -- that should be our goal. Because if we do that, there's no problem we can't solve. There's no challenge we can't meet. I am absolutely convinced of that.

And so I've said before that this campaign probably won't be as sexy as the first one. It'll be tight. It'll be tough. But I also want to remind people who were on the first campaign, there's been a lot of revisionist history that says how perfect that first one was. (Laughter.) It didn't feel like that when we were in the middle of it. (Laughter.) And that's part of our democracy. It's always a little messy, and it's always tough. But it's also worth it when it's done right.

And if you're willing to join me on this journey I think at the end of the day you'll see that we're actually able to deliver the kind of change that you can believe in.

So thank you very much, everybody. Thank you. (Applause.)

END  
7:24 P.M. EST

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