

GRICEAN COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE AND BARACK OBAMA SPEECHES
A CASE STUDY

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INDEX

1. Abstract	5
2. Introduction	6
2.1 Objective	8
2.2. Methodology	8
3. Results	12
4. Discussion	14
5. Conclusion	18
6. References	19
7. Annex	20

1. ABSTRACT

Paul Grice was a philosopher that made a great contribution to the development of pragmatics after the publication of the essay 'Logic and Conversation' in 1975. The core of the document is the Cooperative Principle which set four maxims (quantity, quality, relation and manner) that should govern a conversation. The violations of the maxims also lead us to the concept of implicature. This document reviews a sample of political speeches under the Gricean Cooperative Principle perspective, in order to assess the violations of the maxims. The five speeches under study have been addressed by Barack Obama, two of them are related to the approval of regulations, one to the death of Osama bin Laden and the remaining two are his Victory speeches. A review of the texts has been conducted to mark those instances registering a violation of the Gricean maxims. The length of the speeches and approval index of the President at the moment of each speech have been also considered. The review of the results per number of violations aggregated and by individual speech reveal that the maxim of quantity shows the highest number of occurrences while the maxim of quality records the lowest. We will conclude that the different types of speeches produce different patterns of violations and that the highest and lowest number of violations have a correlation with presidential approval rates.

Key words: Cooperative Principle, maxims, political speeches, violations.

2. INTRODUCTION

Political speeches are communication acts that have had a very significant relevance in society due to their ability to influence people, to provide continuity to the relevant politicians, and to be used as convincing instruments to gain society approval for political decisions, regardless of their nature or actual convenience.

These instruments have been historically able to align people to support wars, to stigmatize a human race, or even to forgive innumerable types of crimes. Such an important tool for politicians is often managed by teams of capable professionals, who design every single piece of a speech, while taking into consideration facts like the audience, the momentum, and the polls. It can even measure the amount of information that goes public that becomes, from that specific moment, a part of the general public knowledge.

As Concepción Hernández-Guerra (2013) claims, “a political discourse contains some features that must be constant for them to be recognized and understood by the audience as such but, at the same time, must fulfill the purpose of transmitting the message aimed in that venue with a personal and original style. This is commonly done through layers of direct or subtle content”

From the conversational point of view, the political speech contains several specific features:

- It is intended to an audience that can be composed of a great variety of individuals, including a whole nation or even the entire world.
- There is no verbal interaction between the speaker and the addressees.
- It includes paralinguistic features such as voice quality, intonation and gestures that have proven to be very effective.
- For good or for bad, it can be retrieved in the future, in search of the real outcome of promises, as well as the truths or lies about facts or figures.

As communication acts, political speeches can be studied under a pragmatics point of view. Yule (1996) asserts that pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener

(or reader). One of the pillars of this part of the linguistic science is the Cooperative Principle, originally developed by Paul Grice.

Paul Grice (1913-88) was an English philosopher whose writings have had considerable influence in linguistics and pragmatics. He is generally known for the influential paper 'Logic and Conversation,' published in 1975. In this paper, Grice claims that, in order to communicate, people need to cooperate while exchanging verbal information, and he proposes the 'Cooperative Principle'; "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted direction or purpose of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice, 1975). Davies (2000) claims "Grice's work on the Cooperative Principle initiated the current interest in pragmatics, and led to its development as a separate discipline within linguistics".

On Grice's Maxims

This principle is elaborated by means of a set of maxims, which spell out what it means to cooperate in a conversational way. Grice (1975) describes them as follows:

- The Maxim of Quantity. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange) and do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
- The Maxim of Quality. Try to make your contribution one that is true, i.e. do not say what you believe is false, and do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
- The Maxim of Relation. Make your contributions relevant.
- The Maxim of Manner. Be perspicuous, and specifically, avoid ambiguity, avoid obscurity, be brief and be orderly.

Saeed (1997) claims that it is important to realize that the conversational principles that Grice proposed are not rules, like phonological or morphological rules, which people have to follow to speak a language; nor are they moral principles. In addition to this. Blakemore (1992), also explains that Grice's main

concern was with the role of these maxims in the explanation of the way speakers may communicate more than what they actually say.

Implicatures

Grice is also known for presenting the idea of 'conversational implicature' in terms of this theory. Implicature means what is implied. Conversational implicature is related to a meaning or message that is implicated in a conversation. When people say more of, or say less of something, they produce certain extra meaning beyond the literal meanings of words and sentences. This extra meaning is conversationally dependent, hence conversational implicature. Following this line of thought, violations of the maxims result in implicatures.

Cruse (2004), adds that there are two main mechanisms for implicatures, The first causes standard implicatures and requires the assumption that the speaker is doing his best to follow the cooperative principle, even the result may not be the best, from the hearer perspective. The second one involves the deliberate violation of the maxims, which is intended to be perceived as such by the hearer, without a willing abandonment of the cooperative principle.

2.1. OBJECTIVE

The objective of this paper is to analyze several political speeches by Barack Obama (henceforth BO), who is considered one of the most important political orators in the 21st century, in order to determine if the maxims related to the Cooperative Principle are observed or not, and if the topic, the moment in time (measured by the approval rating) and the length of each speech have an influence in the results.

We will also try to see if the number of violations has a reflection on the acceptance rates of BO at the moment in time of the speeches.

2.2 METHODOLOGY

Grice explains (Thomas, 1995) that that there are five different ways to fail to fulfill a maxim (violating, opting out, clashing, flouting and suspending). For the sake of clarity, we will generically use 'violation', to refer to the non-observance of the maxims.

For the purpose of this work, a corpus of five speeches pronounced by Barack Obama has been selected from the website www.americanrhetoric.com. The rationale has been to obtain a representative sample by selecting different topics, they are two samples from pure political and civil events, such as the promulgation of regulations; his two victory speeches, that include a holistic review of BO position regarding many different issues, and an additional one related to the fate of an old but long wanted enemy of the U.S.

The speeches are:

1. Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (21 July 2010)

This regulation, also known as Dodd-Frank Act was, a response to the 2008 financial crisis, which adversely affected millions of American families and resulted in anger feelings against the financial services industry.

2. On the USSC Ruling on the Affordable Care Act (28 June 2012)

The Affordable Care Act is the result of one of the pillars of the political program of Barack Obama and represents one of the biggest changes in the US healthcare programs. The approval took long periods of discussions and negotiations. This speech is a consequence of the Supreme Court ruling.

3. Speech Announcing the Death of Osama bin Laden (1 May 2011)

Almost ten years after 9-11. US Forces managed to capture and kill Osama bin Laden, who was considered the mastermind behind the attacks.

4. President-Elect Victory Speech (4 November 2008)

Pronounced after his first election, this speech captivated worldwide attention, as it was the first time that a black individual reached the presidency of the US.

5. Second Presidential Election Victory Speech (7 November 2012)

Leaving behind all considerations about the reasons for his first victory, Barack Obama obtained a second mandate defeating Romney, remarkably winning both the popular vote and the electoral college.

Following the selection, a review of each speech has been conducted to determine the number of violations for each of the Grice's maxims. This exercise has been performed comparing the description of each maxim with every sentence of the text. The same criteria have been applied to every speech. For easy identification, violations have marked in the text using different colours (Annex I).

Example 1 (1st speech):

"We are gathered in the heart of our nation's capital, surrounded by memorials to leaders and citizens who served our nation in its earliest days and in its days of greatest trial."

This paragraph represents a violation of the maxim of quantity, as too much information is provided to inform to an audience that he speaks from Washington.

Example 2 (2nd speech):

"I carried Natoma's story with me every day of the fight to pass this law"

This sentence represents a violation of the maxim of quality. B.O. refers here to the particular case of Natoma Canfield, who have seen how her insurance rates have been increased year by year, because she suffered from cancer 18 years ago. The debates in the Senate and the House went from 2008 to 2010, and this speech was pronounced in 2012 so it is highly improbable that he had carried the story every day.

Example 3 (4th speech):

"If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer."

This paragraph, taken from the first victory speech, represents a violation of the maxim of relation where one says things that are pertinent to the discussion. The content is not related to the topic of discussion.

Example 4 (5th speech):

“Now, we will disagree, sometimes fiercely, about how to get there. As it has for more than two centuries, progress will come in fits and starts. It's not always a straight line. It's not always a smooth path. By itself, the recognition that we have common hopes and dreams won't end all the gridlock, or solve all our problems, or substitute for the painstaking work of building consensus, and making the difficult compromises needed to move this country forward. But that common bond is where we must begin.”

This paragraph, taken from the second victory speech, represents an example of a violation of the maxim of manner, as language is neither clear nor brief.

To find out the aspects related with political environment at the moment of each speech, the data about B.O.'s approval ratings (Table 2) have been taken from Gallup Company, known for its public opinion polls. The extension (number of words) of each speech has been also considered (Table 3).

3. RESULTS

After the review of the selected speeches (Annex I), the violations of each maxim have been marked as follows:

- The maxim of quantity (1) is marked yellow
- The maxim of quality (2) is marked green
- The maxim of relation (3) is marked blue
- The maxim of manner (4) is marked red

The number of occurrences per speech is as follows:

Speech	Maxim 1	Maxim 2	Maxim 3	Maxim 4	Total
Wall St. Reform	7	9	1	3	20
Affordable Care Act	6	3	2	3	14
Death of bin Laden	13	2	1	2	18
1 st Victory Speech	11	3	10	7	31
2 nd Victory Speech	7	1	9	9	26
Total	44	18	23	24	109

Table 1

According to the information retrieved from Gallup website the approval ratings for Barack Obama at the time of each speech are:

Speech	Date	Approval Rate
Wall St. Reform	21/07/2010	45%
Affordable Care Act	28/06/2012	47%
Death of bin Laden	01/05/2011	44%
1 st Victory Speech	04/11/2008	67%
2 nd Victory Speech	07/11/2012	51%

Table 2

The extension of each speech results as follows:

Speech	Words
Wall St. Reform	1,549
Affordable Care Act	1,224
Death of bin Laden	1,387
1 st Victory Speech	2,061
2 nd Victory Speech	2,172

Table 3

4. DISCUSSION

The review of the results according to each maxim shows the following:

Maxim 1 'Quantity': Speaker is as informative as required.

The highest occurrence (13) is in the speech related to the death of Osama bin Laden (1,387 words), when BO approval rate was at 44% (the lowest one).

The lowest occurrence (6) is in Affordable Care Act speech (1,224 words), when BO approval rate was at 47%.

Maxim 2 'Quality': Speaker tells the truth or provable by adequate evidence.

The highest occurrence (9) is in the speech related to the Wall Street Reform (1,549 words), when BO approval rate was at 45%.

The lowest occurrence (1) is in the 2nd Victory speech (2,172 words, the longest), when BO approval rate was at 51%.

Maxim 3 'Relation': Speech is relevant to the topic of discussion.

The highest occurrence (10) is in the 1st Victory speech (2,061 words), when BO approval rate was at 67% (the highest one).

The lowest occurrences (1) are in the Wall Street Reform and Osama bin Laden speeches (1,549 and 1,387 words), when BO approval rate was at 45% and 44% respectively.

Maxim 4 'Manner': Speaker avoids ambiguity or obscurity.

The highest occurrence (9) is in the 2nd Victory speech (2,172 words, the longest), when BO approval rate was at 51%.

The lowest occurrence (2) are in Osama bin Laden speech (1,387 words), when BO approval rate was at 44%.

Highs and Lows

The highest number of violations (31) for all maxims occurs in the 1st Victory speech (2,061 words), which coincides with the highest approval rate (67%).

The lowest number of violations (14) for all maxims is found in the Affordable Care Act speech (1,224 words, the shortest) when approval rate was at 47%.

The Maxim 1 'Quantity' is, by far, the most recurrent violation (44), taking a significant peak (13) with the speech on the death of Osama bin Laden (1,387 words). His approval rate was the lowest one (44%).

The Maxim 2 'Quality' presents the lowest total occurrence of violations (18).

The review of the results by speech shows the following:

Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (21 July 2010 / 1,549 words)

Maxim 2 'Quality' has the highest number of violations (9) while maxim 3 'Relation' represents the lowest occurrence (1). BO approval rate was 45%.

On the USSC Ruling on the Affordable Care Act (28 June 2012 / 1,224 words)

Maxim 1 'Quantity' has the highest number of violations (6) while maxim 3 'Relation' represents the lowest occurrence (2). BO approval rate was 47%.

Speech Announcing the Death of Osama bin Laden (1 May 2011 / 1,387 words)

Maxim 1 'Quantity' has the highest number of violations (13) while maxim 3 'Relation' represents the lowest occurrence (1). BO approval rate was 44%.

President-Elect Victory Speech (4 November 2008 / 2,061 words)

Maxim 1 'Quantity' has the highest number of violations (11) while maxim 2 'Quality' represents the lowest occurrence (3). BO approval rate was 67%.

Second Presidential Election Victory Speech (7 November 2012 / 2,172 words)

Maxims 3 and 4, 'Relation' and 'Manner', have the highest number of violations (9) while maxim 2 'Quality' represents the lowest occurrence (1). BO approval rate was 51%.

Comments on the maxims

The review indicates that all speeches include at least one breach of the maxims, which represents that political speeches, although single-sided, include all the relevant aspects of a conversation.

The Maxim 2 'Quality' (speaker tells the truth) represents the lower number of occurrences, meaning that BO is usually truthful, which departs from the general impression that most people retain about politicians.

Maxim 1 'Quantity' (be informative) represents the highest number of violations, resulting in the fact that information provided lacks or exceeds what is needed.

Maxim 3 'Relation' (speech is relevant to the topic) and Maxim 4 'Relation' (speaker avoids ambiguity) show a similar total number of violations although in both cases the two victory speeches collect the highest number of occurrences.

Comments on the speeches

Data reflects that those speeches related to the approval of regulations show a lower number of violations. This may connect with the fact that these discourses tell us about already approved regulations, and the underlying subject is at that point in time a closed matter (they are pronounced once the relevant acts have been passed), therefore, it may allow for a more direct language, where there is less room to ignore the maxims.

On the opposite side, the victory speeches offer the highest number of occurrences, probably because this type of discourse covers many different topics, that may range from personal experiences to global geopolitical issues, and include promises. All this may lead to increasing opportunities to fail to comply with the CP and the maxims.

The bin Laden speech offers interesting data, as it includes the highest number of violations of a maxim, 'Quality' in this occasion. This a particular type of a speech that is the outcome of a sudden event that requires the President to immediately address the nation and is usually related to a very serious matter. This also means that it is not scheduled and that is written by BO himself, as Brian Stelter tells us in The New York Times, where he reports that there was a

leakage of confidential information (for obvious reasons, the raid was kept very secret), as Keith Urbahn, the chief of staff for the former defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld pre-announced its content in Twitter. Consideration should also be given to the epic facts related to the underlying event; the secret assault in a foreign country, along with the recall of the fallen in the 9-11 attacks. All these surrounding circumstances may affect the characteristics of this speech.

Comments on the number of words

Although logic may suggest that longer speeches should result in greater probabilities of violations, data reflect there is no proportional difference of occurrences between the shortest and the longest speeches. Needless to say that violations are not produced by means of single words, they vary from short sentences to full paragraphs.

Comments on the BO approval ratings

An interesting outcome of the review of the data is the fact that the highest number of violations (31) is included in the 1st victory speech where the approval rating was at its highest peak (67%). On the other hand, the lowest number of violations (18 for the bin Laden speech) matches also with the lowest approval rating (44%).

A further specific study using a greater sample will be needed to assure that the premise 'the higher the approval rate, the higher the number of violations, and vice versa' can be applied.

5. CONCLUSION

Grice's Logic and Conversation, the paper that introduces us in the Cooperation Principle and the maxims, has been considered as one of the pillars of pragmatics. However, it must be made clear that it does not pretend to establish red lines on the way individuals must conduct a conversation, nor violating the maxims means ignoring the Cooperation Principle.

As for the subject of study, it is generally agreed that Barack Obama retains a very high reputation as a political speaker. He is acknowledged to be a friendly individual, with a frank style of conversation that is easy to understand by everyone. His speeches retain always an affectionate feeling, supported with a wise use of rhetorical devices that contribute to making them successful.

The review of the texts under the cooperation principle perspective reveals that the maxims are frequently ignored. However, this does not go against the contents of the intended message. It can be concluded also that the underlying subject of each speech, along with the political environment (measured by the approval rate at every moment in time), may have an influence on a number of violations, and that this number is not affected by the number of words. At first sight, it also seems that lower approval rates lead to a lower number of violations. Nevertheless, it is suggested that an additional in-depth study, using a greater sample base, can confirm or deny this hypothesis.

Speeches at the level of the Presidency of the US are very carefully crafted, leaving nothing to chance. Every violation, whatever the type it may be, can definitely have the capability to persuade the hearer to accept statements or ideas that can merely go in the interests of the relevant politician. In this sense, the speech becomes a priceless political tool.

"Speech is power: speech is to persuade, to convert, to compel."

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

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7. ANNEX I - Speeches

1. Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (21 July 2010)

Thank you. Everybody, please have a seat, have a seat.

Well, good morning, everyone.

We are gathered in the heart of our nation's capital, surrounded by memorials to leaders and citizens who served our nation in its earliest days and in its days of greatest trial. Today is such a time for America.

Over the past two years, we have faced the worst recession since the Great Depression. Eight million people lost their jobs. Tens of millions saw the value of their homes and retirement savings plummet. Countless businesses have been unable to get the loans they need and many have been forced to shut their doors. And although the economy is growing again, too many people are still feeling the pain of the downturn.

Now, while a number of factors led to such a severe recession, the primary cause was a breakdown in our financial system. It was a crisis born of a failure of responsibility from certain corners of Wall Street to the halls of power in Washington. For years, our financial sector was governed by antiquated and poorly enforced rules that allowed some to game the system and take risks that endangered the entire economy.

Unscrupulous lenders locked consumers into complex loans with hidden costs. Firms like AIG placed massive, risky bets with borrowed money. And while the rules left abuse and excess unchecked, they also left taxpayers on the hook if a big bank or financial institution ever failed.

Now, even before the crisis hit, I went to Wall Street and I called for common-sense reforms to protect consumers and our economy as a whole. And soon after taking office, I proposed a set of reforms to empower consumers and investors, to bring the shadowy deals that caused this crisis into the light of day, and to put a stop to taxpayer bailouts once and for all. Today, thanks to a lot of people in this room, those reforms will become the law of the land.

For the last year, Chairmen Barney Frank and Chris Dodd have worked day and night. Barney and Chris have worked day and night to bring about this reform. And I am profoundly grateful to them. I would be remiss if I didn't also express my appreciation to Senator Harry Reid and Speaker Nancy Pelosi for their leadership. It wouldn't have happened without them.

Passing this bill was no easy task. To get there, we had to overcome the furious lobbying of an array of powerful interest groups and a partisan minority determined to block change. So the members who are here today, both on the stage and in the audience, they have done a great service in devoting so much time and expertise to this effort, to looking out for the public interests and not the special interests. And I also want to thank the three Republican senators who put partisanship aside, judged this bill on the merits, and voted for reform. We're grateful to them. And the Republican House members. Good to see you, Joe.

Now, let's put this in perspective. The fact is, the financial industry is central to our nation's ability to grow, to prosper, to compete and to innovate. There are a lot of banks that understand and fulfill this vital role, and there are a whole lot of bankers who want

to do right -- and do right -- by their customers. This reform will help foster innovation, not hamper it. It is designed to make sure that everybody follows the same set of rules, so that firms compete on price and quality, **not on tricks and not on traps.**

It demands accountability and responsibility from everyone. It provides certainty to everybody, from bankers to farmers to business owners to consumers. **And unless your business model depends on cutting corners or bilking your customers, you've got nothing to fear from reform.**

Now, for all those Americans who are wondering what Wall Street reform means for you, here's what you can expect. If you've ever applied for a credit card, a student loan, or a mortgage, you know the feeling of signing your name to pages of barely understandable fine print. What often happens as a result is that many Americans are caught by hidden fees and penalties, or saddled with loans they can't afford.

That's what happened to Robin Fox, hit with a massive rate increase on her credit card balance even though she paid her bills on time. That's what happened to Andrew Giordano, who discovered hundreds of dollars in overdraft fees on his bank statement - fees he had no idea he might face. Both are here today. Well, with this law, unfair rate hikes, like the one that hit Robin, will end for good. **And we'll ensure that people like Andrew aren't unwittingly caught by overdraft fees when they sign up for a checking account.**

With this law, we'll crack down on abusive practices in the mortgage industry. We'll make sure that contracts are simpler -- **putting an end to many hidden penalties and fees in complex mortgages** -- so folks know what they're signing.

With this law, students who take out college loans will be provided clear and concise information about their obligations.

And with this law, ordinary investors -- like seniors and folks saving for retirement -- will be able to receive more information about the costs and risks of mutual funds and other investment products, so that they can make better financial decisions as to what will work for them.

So, **all told, these reforms represent the strongest consumer financial protections in history. In history.** And these protections will be enforced by a new consumer watchdog with just one job: looking out for people -- not big banks, not lenders, not investment houses -- looking out for people as they interact with the financial system.

And that's not just good for consumers; that's good for the economy. Because reform will put a stop to a lot of the bad loans that fueled a debt-based bubble. And it will mean all companies will have to seek customers by offering better products, instead of more deceptive ones.

Now, beyond the consumer protections I've outlined, **reform will also rein in the abuse and excess that nearly brought down our financial system. It will finally bring transparency to the kinds of complex and risky transactions that helped trigger the financial crisis. Shareholders will also have a greater say on the pay of CEOs and other executives, so they can reward success instead of failure.**

And finally, because of this law, the American people will never again be asked to foot the bill for Wall Street's mistakes. **There will be no more tax-funded bailouts -- period.** If a large financial institution should ever fail, this reform gives us the ability to wind it down without endangering the broader economy. **And there will be new rules to make clear that no firm is somehow protected because it is "too big to fail," so we don't have another AIG.**

That's what this reform will mean. Now, it doesn't mean our work is over. For these new rules to be effective, regulators will have to be vigilant. We may need to make adjustments along the way as our financial system adapts to these new changes and changes around the globe. **No law can force anybody to be responsible; it's still incumbent on those on Wall Street to heed the lessons of this crisis in terms of how they conduct their businesses.**

The fact is every American -- from Main Street to Wall Street -- has a stake in our financial system. Wall Street banks and firms invest the capital that makes it possible for start-ups to sell new products. They provide loans to businesses to expand and to hire. They back mortgages for families purchasing a new home. That's why we'll all stand to gain from these reforms. We all win when investors around the world have confidence in our markets. We all win when shareholders have more power and more information. We all win when consumers are protected against abuse. **And we all win when folks are rewarded based on how well they perform, not how well they evade accountability.**

In the end, our financial system only works -- our market is only free -- when there are clear rules and basic safeguards that prevent abuse, that check excess, that ensure that it is more profitable to play by the rules than to game the system. And that's what these reforms are designed to achieve -- no more, no less. Because that's how we will ensure that our economy works **for consumers, that it works for investors, that it works for financial institutions** -- that it works for all of us.

This is the central lesson not only of this crisis but of our history. Ultimately, there's no dividing line between Main Street and Wall Street. We rise or fall together as one nation. **So these reforms will help lift our economy and lead all of us to a stronger, more prosperous future.**

And that's why I'm so honored to sign these reforms into law, and I'm so grateful to everybody who worked so hard to make this day possible.

Thank you very much, everybody.

2. On the USSC Ruling on the Affordable Care Act (28 June 2012)

Good afternoon. Earlier today, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act -- **the name of the health care reform we passed two years ago**. In doing so, they've reaffirmed a fundamental principle that here in America -- **in the wealthiest nation on Earth** -- no illness or accident should lead to any family's financial ruin.

I know there will be a lot of discussion today about the politics of all this, about who won and who lost. That's how these things tend to be viewed here in Washington. But that discussion completely misses the point. Whatever the politics, today's decision was a victory for people all over this country whose lives will be more secure because of this law and the Supreme Court's decision to uphold it.

And because this law has a direct impact on so many Americans, I want to take this opportunity to talk about exactly what it means for you.

First, if you're one of the more than 250 million Americans who already have health insurance, you will keep your health insurance -- **this law will only make it more secure and more affordable**. Insurance companies can no longer impose lifetime limits on the amount of care you receive. They can no longer discriminate against children with

preexisting conditions. They can no longer drop your coverage if you get sick. They can no longer jack up your premiums without reason. They are required to provide free preventive care like check-ups and mammograms -- a provision that's already helped 54 million Americans with private insurance. And by this August, nearly 13 million of you will receive a rebate from your insurance company because it spent too much on things like administrative costs and CEO bonuses, and not enough on your health care.

There's more. Because of the Affordable Care Act, young adults under the age of 26 are able to stay on their parent's health care plans -- a provision that's already helped 6 million young Americans. And because of the Affordable Care Act, seniors receive a discount on their prescription drugs -- a discount that's already saved more than 5 million seniors on Medicare about \$600 each.

All of this is happening because of the Affordable Care Act. These provisions provide common-sense protections for middle class families, and they enjoy broad popular support. And thanks to today's decision, all of these benefits and protections will continue for Americans who already have health insurance.

Now, if you're one of the 30 million Americans who don't yet have health insurance, starting in 2014 this law will offer you an array of quality, affordable, private health insurance plans to choose from. Each state will take the lead in designing their own menu of options, and if states can come up with even better ways of covering more people at the same quality and cost, this law allows them to do that, too. And I've asked Congress to help speed up that process, and give states this flexibility in year one.

Once states set up these health insurance marketplaces, known as exchanges, insurance companies will no longer be able to discriminate against any American with a preexisting health condition. They won't be able to charge you more just because you're a woman. They won't be able to bill you into bankruptcy. If you're sick, you'll finally have the same chance to get quality, affordable health care as everyone else. And if you can't afford the premiums, you'll receive a credit that helps pay for it.

Today, the Supreme Court also upheld the principle that people who can afford health insurance should take the responsibility to buy health insurance. This is important for two reasons.

First, when uninsured people who can afford coverage get sick, and show up at the emergency room for care, the rest of us end up paying for their care in the form of higher premiums.

And second, if you ask insurance companies to cover people with preexisting conditions, but don't require people who can afford it to buy their own insurance, some folks might wait until they're sick to buy the care they need -- which would also drive up everybody else's premiums.

That's why, even though I knew it wouldn't be politically popular, and resisted the idea when I ran for this office, we ultimately included a provision in the Affordable Care Act that people who can afford to buy health insurance should take the responsibility to do so. In fact, this idea has enjoyed support from members of both parties, including the current Republican nominee for President.

Still, I know the debate over this law has been divisive. I respect the very real concerns that millions of Americans have shared. And I know a lot of coverage through this health care debate has focused on what it means politically.

Well, it should be pretty clear by now that I didn't do this because it was good politics. I did it because I believed it was good for the country. I did it because I believed it was good for the American people.

There's a framed letter that hangs in my office right now. It was sent to me during the health care debate by a woman named Natoma Canfield. For years and years, Natoma did everything right. She bought health insurance. She paid her premiums on time. But 18 years ago, Natoma was diagnosed with cancer. And even though she'd been cancer-free for more than a decade, her insurance company kept jacking up her rates, year after year. And despite her desire to keep her coverage -- despite her fears that she would get sick again -- she had to surrender her health insurance, and was forced to hang her fortunes on chance.

I carried Natoma's story with me every day of the fight to pass this law. It reminded me of all the Americans, all across the country, who have had to worry not only about getting sick, but about the cost of getting well.

Natoma is well today. And because of this law, there are other Americans -- other sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers -- who will not have to hang their fortunes on chance. These are the Americans for whom we passed this law.

The highest Court in the land has now spoken. We will continue to implement this law. And we'll work together to improve on it where we can. But what we won't do -- what the country can't afford to do -- is refight the political battles of two years ago, or go back to the way things were.

With today's announcement, it's time for us to move forward -- to implement and, where necessary, improve on this law. And now is the time to keep our focus on the most urgent challenge of our time: putting people back to work, paying down our debt, and building an economy where people can have confidence that if they work hard, they can get ahead.

But today, I'm as confident as ever that when we look back five years from now, or 10 years from now, or 20 years from now, we'll be better off because we had the courage to pass this law and keep moving forward.

Thank you. God bless you, and God bless America.

3. Speech Announcing the Death of Osama bin Laden (1 May 2011)

Good evening. Tonight, I can report to the American people and to the world that the United States has conducted an operation that killed Osama bin Laden, the leader of al Qaeda, and a terrorist who's responsible for the murder of thousands of innocent men, women, and children.

It was nearly 10 years ago that a bright September day was darkened by the worst attack on the American people in our history. The images of 9/11 are seared into our national memory -- hijacked planes cutting through a cloudless September sky; the Twin Towers collapsing to the ground; black smoke billowing up from the Pentagon; the wreckage of Flight 93 in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, where the actions of heroic citizens saved even more heartbreak and destruction.

And yet we know that the worst images are those that were unseen to the world. The empty seat at the dinner table. Children who were forced to grow up without their

mother or their father. Parents who would never know the feeling of their child's embrace. Nearly 3,000 citizens taken from us, leaving a gaping hole in our hearts.

On September 11, 2001, in our time of grief, the American people came together. We offered our neighbors a hand, and we offered the wounded our blood. We reaffirmed our ties to each other, and our love of community and country. On that day, no matter where we came from, what God we prayed to, or what race or ethnicity we were, we were united as one American family.

We were also united in our resolve to protect our nation and to bring those who committed this vicious attack to justice. We quickly learned that the 9/11 attacks were carried out by al Qaeda -- an organization headed by Osama bin Laden, which had openly declared war on the United States and was committed to killing innocents in our country and around the globe. And so we went to war against al Qaeda to protect our citizens, our friends, and our allies.

Over the last 10 years, thanks to the tireless and heroic work of our military and our counterterrorism professionals, we've made great strides in that effort. We've disrupted terrorist attacks and strengthened our homeland defense. In Afghanistan, we removed the Taliban government, which had given bin Laden and al Qaeda safe haven and support. And around the globe, we worked with our friends and allies to capture or kill scores of al Qaeda terrorists, including several who were a part of the 9/11 plot.

Yet Osama bin Laden avoided capture and escaped across the Afghan border into Pakistan. Meanwhile, al Qaeda continued to operate from along that border and operate through its affiliates across the world. And so shortly after taking office, I directed Leon Panetta, the director of the CIA, to make the killing or capture of bin Laden the top priority of our war against al Qaeda, even as we continued our broader efforts to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat his network.

Then, last August, after years of painstaking work by our intelligence community, I was briefed on a possible lead to bin Laden. It was far from certain, and it took many months to run this thread to ground. I met repeatedly with my national security team as we developed more information about the possibility that we had located bin Laden hiding within a compound deep inside of Pakistan. And finally, last week, I determined that we had enough intelligence to take action, and authorized an operation to get Osama bin Laden and bring him to justice.

Today, at my direction, the United States launched a targeted operation against that compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. A small team of Americans carried out the operation with extraordinary courage and capability. No Americans were harmed. They took care to avoid civilian casualties. After a firefight, they killed Osama bin Laden and took custody of his body.

For over two decades, bin Laden has been al Qaeda's leader and symbol, and has continued to plot attacks against our country and our friends and allies. The death of bin Laden marks the most significant achievement to date in our nation's effort to defeat al Qaeda.

Yet his death does not mark the end of our effort. There's no doubt that al Qaeda will continue to pursue attacks against us. We must -- and we will -- remain vigilant at home and abroad.

As we do, we must also reaffirm that the United States is not -- and never will be -- at war with Islam. I've made clear, just as President Bush did shortly after 9/11, that our war is not against Islam. Bin Laden was not a Muslim leader; he was a mass murderer of Muslims. Indeed, al Qaeda has slaughtered scores of Muslims in many countries,

including our own. So his demise should be welcomed by all who believe in peace and human dignity.

Over the years, I've repeatedly made clear that we would take action within Pakistan if we knew where bin Laden was. That is what we've done. But it's important to note that our counterterrorism cooperation with Pakistan helped lead us to bin Laden and the compound where he was hiding. Indeed, bin Laden had declared war against Pakistan as well, and ordered attacks against the Pakistani people.

Tonight, I called President Zardari, and my team has also spoken with their Pakistani counterparts. They agree that this is a good and historic day for both of our nations. And going forward, it is essential that Pakistan continue to join us in the fight against al Qaeda and its affiliates.

The American people did not choose this fight. It came to our shores, and started with the senseless slaughter of our citizens. After nearly 10 years of service, struggle, and sacrifice, we know well the costs of war. These efforts weigh on me every time I, as Commander-in-Chief, have to sign a letter to a family that has lost a loved one, or look into the eyes of a service member who's been gravely wounded.

So Americans understand the costs of war. Yet as a country, we will never tolerate our security being threatened, nor stand idly by when our people have been killed. We will be relentless in defense of our citizens and our friends and allies. We will be true to the values that make us who we are. And on nights like this one, we can say to those families who have lost loved ones to al Qaeda's terror: Justice has been done.

Tonight, we give thanks to the countless intelligence and counterterrorism professionals who've worked tirelessly to achieve this outcome. The American people do not see their work, nor know their names. But tonight, they feel the satisfaction of their work and the result of their pursuit of justice.

We give thanks for the men who carried out this operation, for they exemplify the professionalism, patriotism, and unparalleled courage of those who serve our country. And they are part of a generation that has borne the heaviest share of the burden since that September day.

Finally, let me say to the families who lost loved ones on 9/11 that we have never forgotten your loss, nor wavered in our commitment to see that we do whatever it takes to prevent another attack on our shores.

And tonight, let us think back to the sense of unity that prevailed on 9/11. I know that it has, at times, frayed. Yet today's achievement is a testament to the greatness of our country and the determination of the American people.

The cause of securing our country is not complete. But tonight, we are once again reminded that America can do whatever we set our mind to. That is the story of our history, whether it's the pursuit of prosperity for our people, or the struggle for equality for all our citizens; our commitment to stand up for our values abroad, and our sacrifices to make the world a safer place.

Let us remember that we can do these things not just because of wealth or power, but because of who we are: one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Thank you.

May God bless you.

And may God bless the United States of America.

4. President-Elect Victory Speech (4 November 2008)

Hello, Chicago.

If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer.

It's the answer told by lines that stretched around schools and churches in numbers this nation has never seen; by people who waited three hours and four hours, many for the very first time in their lives, because they believed that this time must be different; that their voices could be that difference.

It's the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled -- Americans who sent a message to the world that we have never been just a collection of individuals or a collection of Red States and Blue States: we are, and always will be, the United States of America!

It's the answer that -- that led those who have been told for so long by so many to be cynical, and fearful, and doubtful about what we can achieve to put their hands on the arc of history and bend it once more toward the hope of a better day.

It's been a long time coming, but tonight, because of what we did on this day, in this election, at this defining moment, change has come to America.

A little bit earlier this evening, I received an extraordinarily gracious call from Senator McCain. Senator McCain fought long and hard in this campaign, and he's fought even longer and harder for the country that he loves. He has endured sacrifices for America that most of us cannot begin to imagine. We are better off for the service rendered by this brave and selfless leader. I congratulate him; I congratulate Governor Palin for all that they've achieved, and I look forward to working with them to renew this nation's promise in the months ahead.

I want to thank my partner in this journey, a man who campaigned from his heart and spoke for the men and women he grew up with on the streets of Scranton and rode with on the train home to Delaware, the Vice President-elect of the United States, Joe Biden.

And I would not be standing here tonight without the unyielding support of my best friend for the last 16 years, the rock of our family, the love of my life, the nation's next First Lady: Michelle Obama. Sasha and Malia, I love you both more than you can imagine, and you have earned the new puppy that's coming with us to the White House. And while she's no longer with us, I know my grandmother's watching, along with the family that made me who I am. I miss them tonight, and I know that my debt to them is beyond measure. To my sister Maya, my sister Alma, all my other brothers and sisters -- thank you so much for the support that you've given me. I am grateful to them.

And to my campaign manager, David Plouffe -- the unsung hero of this campaign, who built the best -- the best political campaign, I think, in the history of the United States of America. To my chief strategist David Axelrod -- who's been a partner with me every step of the way. To the best campaign team ever assembled in the history of politics --

you made this happen, and I am forever grateful for what you've sacrificed to get it done.

But above all, I will never forget who this victory truly belongs to. It belongs to you. **It belongs to you.** I was never the likeliest candidate for this office. We didn't start with much money or many endorsements. **Our campaign was not hatched in the halls of Washington. It began in the backyards of Des Moines and the living rooms of Concord and the front porches of Charleston. It was built by working men and women who dug into what little savings they had to give 5 dollars and 10 dollars and 20 dollars to the cause.** It grew strength from the young people who rejected the myth of their generation's apathy, who left their homes and their families for jobs that offered little pay and less sleep. It drew strength from the not-so-young people who braved the bitter cold and scorching heat to knock on doors of perfect strangers, and from the millions of Americans who volunteered and organized and proved that more than two centuries later a government of the people, by the people, and for the people has not perished from the Earth. **This is your victory.**

And I know you didn't do this just to win an election. And I know you didn't do it for me. You did it because you understand the enormity of the task that lies ahead. For even as we celebrate tonight, we know the challenges that tomorrow will bring are the greatest of our lifetime: two wars, a planet in peril, the worst financial crisis in a century. Even as we stand here tonight, we know there are brave Americans waking up in the deserts of Iraq and the mountains of Afghanistan to risk their lives for us. There are mothers and fathers who will lie awake after the children fall asleep and wonder how they'll make the mortgage or pay their doctors' bills or save enough for their child's college education. **There's new energy to harness, new jobs to be created, new schools to build, and threats to meet, alliances to repair.**

The road ahead will be long. Our climb will be steep. We may not get there in one year or even in one term. But, America, I have never been more hopeful than I am tonight that we will get there. I promise you, we as a people will get there.

There will be setbacks and false starts. There are many who won't agree with every decision or policy I make as President. And we know the government can't solve every problem. **But I will always be honest with you about the challenges we face. I will listen to you, especially when we disagree.** And, above all, I will ask you to join in the work of remaking this nation, the only way it's been done in America for 221 years -- **block by block, brick by brick, calloused hand by calloused hand.** What began 21 months ago in the depths of winter cannot end on this autumn night.

This victory alone is not the change we seek. It is only the chance for us to make that change. And that cannot happen if we go back to the way things were. It can't happen without you, without a new spirit of service, a new spirit of sacrifice. So let us summon a new spirit of patriotism, of responsibility, where each of us resolves to pitch in and work harder and look after not only ourselves but each other. Let us remember that, if this financial crisis taught us anything, it's that we cannot have a thriving Wall Street while Main Street suffers. In this country, we rise or fall as one nation, as one people. Let's resist the temptation to fall back on the same partisanship and pettiness and immaturity that has poisoned our politics for so long.

Let's remember that it was a man from this state who first carried the banner of the Republican Party to the White House, a Party founded on the values of self-reliance and individual liberty and national unity. Those are values that we all share. **And while the Democratic Party has won a great victory tonight, we do so with a measure of humility and determination to heal the divides that have held back our progress. As**

Lincoln said to a nation far more divided than ours: "We are not enemies but friends...." "Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection."

And to those Americans who -- whose support I have yet to earn, I may not have won your vote tonight, but I hear your voices. I need your help. And I will be your President, too.

And to all those watching tonight from beyond our shores, from parliaments and palaces, to those who are huddled around radios in the forgotten corners of the world, our stories are singular, but our destiny is shared, and a new dawn of American leadership is at hand.

To those -- To those who would tear the world down: We will defeat you. To those who seek peace and security: We support you. And to all those who have wondered if America's beacon still burns as bright: Tonight we've proved once more that the true strength of our nation comes not from the might of our arms or the scale of our wealth, but from the enduring power of our ideals: democracy, liberty, opportunity, and unyielding hope.

That's the true genius of America: that America can change. Our union can be perfected. What we've already achieved gives us hope for what we can and must achieve tomorrow.

This election had many firsts and many stories that will be told for generations. But one that's on my mind tonight's about a woman who cast her ballot in Atlanta. She's a lot like the millions of others who stood in line to make their voice heard in this election except for one thing: Ann Nixon Cooper is 106 years old.

She was born just a generation past slavery; a time when there were no cars on the road or planes in the sky; when someone like her couldn't vote for two reasons: because she was a woman and because of the color of her skin.

And tonight, I think about all that she's seen throughout her century in America -- the heartache and the hope; the struggle and the progress; the times we were told that we can't, and the people who pressed on with that American creed: Yes we can.

At a time when women's voices were silenced and their hopes dismissed, she lived to see them stand up and speak out and reach for the ballot: Yes we can.

When there was despair in the dust bowl and depression across the land, she saw a nation conquer fear itself with a New Deal, new jobs, a new sense of common purpose: Yes we can.

When the bombs fell on our harbor and tyranny threatened the world, she was there to witness a generation rise to greatness and a democracy was saved: Yes we can.

She was there for the buses in Montgomery, the hoses in Birmingham, a bridge in Selma, and a preacher from Atlanta who told a people that "we shall overcome": Yes we can.

A man touched down on the moon, a wall came down in Berlin, a world was connected by our own science and imagination.

And this year, in this election, she touched her finger to a screen, and cast her vote, because after 106 years in America, through the best of times and the darkest of hours, she knows how America can change: Yes we can.

America, we have come so far. We have seen so much. But there is so much more to do. So tonight, let us ask ourselves -- if our children should live to see the next century; if my daughters should be so lucky to live as long as Ann Nixon Cooper, what change will they see? What progress will we have made?

This is our chance to answer that call. This is our moment. This is our time, to put our people back to work and open doors of opportunity for our kids; to restore prosperity and promote the cause of peace; to reclaim the American dream and reaffirm that fundamental truth, that, out of many, we are one;² that while we breathe, we hope. And where we are met with cynicism and doubt and those who tell us that we can't, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes, we can.

Thank you.

God bless you.

And may God bless the United States of America.

5. Second Presidential Election Victory Speech (7 November 2012)

Thank you. Thank you so much.

Tonight, more than 200 years after a former colony won the right to determine its own destiny, the task of perfecting our union moves forward.

It moves forward because of you. It moves forward because you reaffirmed the spirit that has triumphed over war and depression; the spirit that has lifted this country from the depths of despair to the great heights of hope -- the belief that while each of us will pursue our own individual dreams, we are an American family, and we rise or fall together, as one nation, and as one people.

Tonight, in this election, you, the American people, reminded us that while our road has been hard, while our journey has been long, we have picked ourselves up, we have fought our way back, and we know in our hearts that for the United States of America, the best is yet to come.

I want to thank every American who participated in this election. Whether you voted for the very first time or waited in line for a very long time -- by the way, we have to fix that. Whether you pounded the pavement or picked up the phone -- whether you held an Obama sign or a Romney sign, you made your voice heard, and you made a difference.

I just spoke with Governor Romney, and I congratulated him and Paul Ryan on a hard-fought campaign. We may have battled fiercely, but it's only because we love this country deeply, and we care so strongly about its future. From George to Lenore to their son Mitt, the Romney family has chosen to give back to America through public service, and that is a legacy that we honor and applaud tonight.

In the weeks ahead, I also look forward to sitting down with Governor Romney to talk about where we can work together to move this country forward.

I want to thank my friend and partner of the last four years, America's happy warrior -- the best Vice President anybody could ever hope for -- Joe Biden.

And I wouldn't be the man I am today without the woman who agreed to marry me 20 years ago. Let me say this publicly -- Michelle, I have never loved you more. I have

never been prouder to watch the rest of America fall in love with you, too, as our nation's First Lady. Sasha and Malia, before our very eyes, you're growing up to become two strong, smart, beautiful young women, just like your mom. And I'm so proud of you guys. But I will say that for now, one dog is probably enough.

To the best campaign team and volunteers in the history of politics -- the best. **The best ever.** Some of you were new this time around, and some of you have been at my side since the very beginning. But all of you are family. No matter what you do or where you go from here, you will carry the memory of the history we made together, and you will have the lifelong appreciation of a grateful President. **Thank you for believing all the way, through every hill, through every valley. You lifted me up the whole way.** And I will always be grateful for everything that you've done and all the incredible work that you put in.

I know that political campaigns can sometimes seem small, even silly. And that provides plenty of fodder for the cynics who tell us that politics is nothing more than a contest of egos, or the domain of special interests. But if you ever get the chance to talk to folks who turned out at our rallies, and crowded along a rope line in a high school gym, or saw folks working late at a campaign office in some tiny county far away from home, you'll discover something else.

You'll hear the determination in the voice of a young field organizer who's worked his way through college, and wants to make sure every child has that same opportunity. You'll hear the pride in the voice of a volunteer who's going door to door because her brother was finally hired when the local auto plant added another shift. You'll hear the deep patriotism in the voice of a military spouse who's working the phones late at night to make sure that no one who fights for this country ever has to fight for a job, or a roof over their head when they come home.

That's why we do this. That's what politics can be. That's why elections matter. It's not small; it's big. It's important.

Democracy in a nation of 300 million can be noisy and messy and complicated. We have our own opinions. Each of us has deeply held beliefs. And when we go through tough times, when we make big decisions as a country, it necessarily stirs passions, stirs up controversy. That won't change after tonight -- and it shouldn't. These arguments we have are a mark of our liberty, and we can never forget that as we speak, people in distant nations are risking their lives right now just for a chance to argue about the issues that matter, the chance to cast their ballots like we did today.

But despite all our differences, most of us share certain hopes for America's future. We want our kids to grow up in a country where they have access to the best schools and the best teachers -- a country that lives up to its legacy as the global leader in technology and discovery and innovation, with all the good jobs and new businesses that follow.

We want our children to live in an America that isn't burdened by debt; that isn't weakened by inequality; that isn't threatened by the destructive power of a warming planet.

We want to pass on a country that's safe and respected and admired around the world; a nation that is defended by the strongest military on Earth **and the best troops this world has ever known** -- **but also a country that moves with confidence beyond this time of war to shape a peace that is built on the promise of freedom and dignity for every human being.**

We believe in a generous America; in a compassionate America; in a tolerant America, open to the dreams of an immigrant's daughter who studies in our schools and pledges to our flag. To the young boy on the South Side of Chicago who sees a life beyond the nearest street corner. To the furniture worker's child in North Carolina who wants to become a doctor or a scientist, an engineer or entrepreneur, a diplomat or even a President. That's the future we hope for. That's the vision we share. That's where we need to go. Forward. That's where we need to go.

Now, we will disagree, sometimes fiercely, about how to get there. As it has for more than two centuries, progress will come in fits and starts. It's not always a straight line. It's not always a smooth path. By itself, the recognition that we have common hopes and dreams won't end all the gridlock, or solve all our problems, or substitute for the painstaking work of building consensus, and making the difficult compromises needed to move this country forward. But that common bond is where we must begin.

Our economy is recovering. A decade of war is ending. A long campaign is now over. And whether I earned your vote or not, I have listened to you. I have learned from you. And you've made me a better President. With your stories and your struggles, I return to the White House more determined and more inspired than ever about the work there is to do, and the future that lies ahead.

Tonight, you voted for action, not politics as usual. You elected us to focus on your jobs, not ours. And in the coming weeks and months, I am looking forward to reaching out and working with leaders of both parties to meet the challenges we can only solve together: reducing our deficit; reforming our tax code; fixing our immigration system; freeing ourselves from foreign oil. **We've got more work to do.**

But that doesn't mean your work is done. The role of citizen in our democracy does not end with your vote. America has never been about what can be done for us. It's about what can be done by us, together, through the hard and frustrating but necessary work of self-government. That's the principle we were founded on.

This country has more wealth than any nation, but that's not what makes us rich. We have the most powerful military in history, but that's not what makes us strong. Our university, culture are the envy of the world, but that's not what keeps the world coming to our shores.

What makes America exceptional are the bonds that hold together the most diverse nation on Earth -- the belief that our destiny is shared; that this country only works when we accept certain obligations to one another, and to future generations; that the freedom which so many Americans have fought for and died for comes with responsibilities as well as rights, and among those are love and charity and duty and patriotism. That's what makes America great.

I am hopeful tonight because I have seen this spirit at work in America. I've seen it in the family business whose owners would rather cut their own pay than lay off their neighbors, and in the workers who would rather cut back their hours than see a friend lose a job.

I've seen it in the soldiers who re-enlist after losing a limb, and in those SEALs who charged up the stairs into darkness and danger because they knew there was a buddy behind them, watching their back.

I've seen it on the shores of New Jersey and New York, where leaders from every party and level of government have swept aside their differences to help a community rebuild from the wreckage of a terrible storm.

And I saw it just the other day in Mentor, Ohio, where a father told the story of his eight-year-old daughter, whose long battle with leukemia nearly cost their family everything, had it not been for health care reform passing just a few months before the insurance company was about to stop paying for her care. I had an opportunity to not just talk to the father, but meet this incredible daughter of his. And when he spoke to the crowd, listening to that father's story, every parent in that room had tears in their eyes, because we knew that little girl could be our own. And I know that every American wants her future to be just as bright.

That's who we are. That's the country I'm so proud to lead as your President. And tonight, despite all the hardship we've been through, despite all the frustrations of Washington, I've never been more hopeful about our future. I have never been more hopeful about America. And I ask you to sustain that hope.

I'm not talking about blind optimism -- the kind of hope that just ignores the enormity of the tasks ahead or the roadblocks that stand in our path. I'm not talking about the wishful idealism that allows us to just sit on the sidelines or shirk from a fight. I have always believed that hope is that stubborn thing inside us that insists, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that something better awaits us, so long as we have the courage to keep reaching, to keep working, to keep fighting.

America, I believe we can build on the progress we've made, and continue to fight for new jobs, and new opportunity, and new security for the middle class. I believe we can keep the promise of our founding -- the idea that if you're willing to work hard, it doesn't matter who you are, or where you come from, or what you look like, or where you love -- it doesn't matter whether you're black or white, or Hispanic or Asian, or Native American, or young or old, or rich or poor, abled, disabled, gay or straight -- you can make it here in America if you're willing to try.

I believe we can seize this future together -- because we are not as divided as our politics suggest; we're not as cynical as the pundits believe; we are greater than the sum of our individual ambitions; and we remain more than a collection of red states and blue states. We are, and forever will be, the United States of America. And together, with your help, and God's grace, we will continue our journey forward, and remind the world just why it is that we live in the greatest nation on Earth.

Thank you, America. God bless you. God bless these United States.