



Written by [Mary McHugh](#) on October 27, 2010

## Obama Makes Ocean-sized Waves in Rhode Island

President Barack Obama made a quick trip to Rhode Island on October 25 for some campaign-related events. The five hours he spent there were not without some controversy.



Late afternoon found Obama making remarks at the American Cord and Webbing Company in Woonsocket. Here, according to [Fox News](#), he stirred some controversy by remarking that in the bright economic times to come due to the hard work of the Democrats, We gotta have middle class families up in front. We don't mind the Republicans joining us. They can come for the ride, but they gotta sit in back."

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This was followed by an early evening Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee fundraising reception at the Rhode Island Convention Center in Providence. The President had been expected to support not only Providence Mayor David Cicilline, the Democrat running for the congressional seat being vacated by Rep. Patrick Kennedy, but also Democrat Frank Caprio, who is running for Governor. This latter endorsement led to ire amongst Democrats. According to Politico:

Out of respect for his friend Lincoln Chafee, the president decided not to get involved in this race, spokesman Bill Burton told reporters during a briefing on Air Force One.

Pressed on how the White House can claim it is doing everything possible to help Democrats while the president stands on the sidelines of a competitive race, Burton stuck to the script: The president's feeling is, he has respect for his friend Lincoln Chafee, and hes not going to get involved in this race, he said.

Chafee, a former Republican who is the son of longtime senator John Chafee, poses a dilemma for Obama. A moderate New England Republican who served with Obama in the Senate, he lost his bid for reelection in 2006. But just after leaving the GOP, he gave Obama a high-profile endorsement before the states 2008 presidential primary.

At the same time, however, Caprio endorsed rival Hillary Clinton during her epic battle with Obama for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination. Clinton took the Rhode Island Democratic primary with 58 percent of the vote.

At this point Caprio, the jilted candidate, stated that Obama could take his endorsement and shove it.

The final part of the presidential evening saw Obama appear at another DCCC event. This was a private, \$7,500-per-plate fundraiser on the east side of Providence at the home of Arnold "Buff" Chace, Jr., a longtime Democratic supporter.

There were fewer than 50 people there according to the *Providence Journal*:



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The gathering took place in a living room that featured several oil paintings portraits over the facing fireplaces at either end of the room, a seascape, some landscapes and a rustic scene of people in red hunting caps.

Guests wore business attire suits and ties, skirts and pantsuits, dark colors predominating.

Guests included three of the four-member Rhode Island Democratic congressional delegation Rhode Island Senators Jack Reed and Sheldon Whitehouse and Kennedy. Rep. James R. Langevin had left the presidential party at an earlier stop.

Also on hand: Rep. Chris Van Hollen, D-Maryland, chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee who introduced the president and Cicilline.

In attendance too, was consultant Ira Magaziner, the Rhode Islander who managed former President Bill Clinton's unsuccessful health care initiative. Magaziner won a friendly acknowledgment from the president.

"He was there for the last round in 1994," said the president, referring to the health care initiative. "He knows how tough it is."

The President spoke for about 20 minutes then announced he could not stay to eat, stating, I've got to go home to tuck in the girls and walk the dog and scoop the poop."

Reactions were varied, with some insulted he would leave them with such a parting remark. Others were upset his stay was so brief, especially at \$7,500 per head. There was some general philosophic sentiment, as many felt the purpose of the Presidents visit was achieved with the money it had raised for Democratic campaigns; others were resentful to think they were used simply as ATM machines. During the floods in the area last spring, Obama visited New England for fundraisers, but did not fly over Rhode Island at that time to view the devastation a gesture still remembered as neglectful. Other citizens felt resentment that his latest visit with accompanying presidential motorcade, needlessly coincided with rush hour to make their work day harder. They blogged accordingly. In addition, there were those who, after days of incessantly hearing through the media of menu details and arrangements for the Chace house fundraiser, were exasperated to find the President quickly returning to Washington without dining.

With even some Democrats criticizing many aspects of his Rhode Island trip by then, it could be the White House was a smarter place to be.

Photo: AP Images



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