

Administration of Barack Obama, 2016

Remarks to the United States Conference of Mayors
January 21, 2016

The President. Thank you so much. Thank you.

Audience member. We love you!

The President. Love you back. Everybody, have a seat, have a seat.

Well, Stephanie, thank you for that wonderful introduction. Welcome to the White House. It is great to see so many familiar faces, people who I have not only worked with, but who have become friends over the years. And I want to welcome all of our newly elected mayors as well. Congratulations. The rest of you, keep hazing to the minimum. *[Laughter]* If they tell you you've got to carry their stuff and all that, that's not true. So don't let them take advantage of you.

I'm not going to speak long at the outset, primarily because you already heard from Michelle, and I always suffer from the comparison. *[Laughter]* I know that she spoke to you today about ending veterans' homelessness, which is an issue that we all care so deeply about. But I did want to just make a few remarks at the top, and it echoes what Stephanie said in her introduction.

When I took office, I made it a priority to build a strong partnership with mayors in this room and all across the country. And thanks to all of you, America has made extraordinary progress over the past 7 years.

Mayors can't wait for Congress. Mayors can't get stuck in partisan gridlock. We've got Republican mayors here and Democratic mayors, but frankly, if you're a mayor, nobody cares what your party is, they care what you're getting done. You don't have time for a lot of bluster and baloney. *[Laughter]* Your constituents expect results.

And that's why I think on so many issues—from fighting for working families to combating climate change, to expanding high-tech jobs, to increasing the minimum wage—we have been able to work together to get a lot of things done. In fact, about 40 cities and counties have taken action to raise the minimum wage. Forty have taken action on paid family leave and paid sick leave. Twenty cities and counties are competing in our Healthy Communities Challenge to get more uninsured folks signed up for health coverage. From Little Rock to San Diego, cities are putting people to work retrofitting buildings so that they're more energy efficient. Earlier today, my Administration announced that we are going to award 13 cities, States, and counties \$1 billion to help build more climate-resilient communities.

And unlike, sometimes, government officials at other levels, mayors understand that the services and the effectiveness of local governments and government generally is something that we can't take for granted, that we have to work for and fight for and invest in every single day.

Some of you know I was in Detroit yesterday, but the day before that, I was meeting with Mayor Weaver, newly elected in Flint, Michigan, to talk about what has been a inexcusable situation with respect to drinking water there. In last month's bipartisan budget agreement, we secured additional funding to help cities like yours build water infrastructure. And we're going to have that funding available to you by the end of next week, and that includes more than \$80

million for the state of Michigan. Our children should not have to be worried about the water that they're drinking in American cities. That's not something that we should accept.

All of you are facing some chronic challenges. They preceded your term in office, and we don't expect that we're going to solve all of them immediately, but the goal here is consistently to make progress. One of those areas where we all have concerns is when it comes to violence on our streets and what happens to our young people. And here, again, we've been blessed with outstanding partnerships with so many of you.

In places like Columbia, South Carolina, Mayor Steve Benjamin is implementing recommendations from our Task Force on community policing. In Oak Creek, Mayor Steve Scaffidi, after seeing a terrible tragedy of gun violence in his community, has been working to implement steps that can reduce gun violence in his area. The U.S. Conference of Mayors, understanding the importance of a global economy and making sure that U.S. businesses are creating U.S. jobs and that we're exporting, have been outstanding partners with us on promoting the trade—the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which is going to cut 18,000 taxes, tariffs, on American-made goods and products. And that means that we're going to be able to sell more to other people. They're already selling to us. We want to make sure that we're out there writing the rules of the road so that American businesses and American jobs are not left behind in one of the most dynamic, fastest growing regions of the world. So many of you have worked together with us on "My Brother's Keeper" and recognizing that we are going to have stronger cities, stronger states, and a stronger country if we make sure that every young person, particularly so many of our young men, are steered away from crime and away from prison and are getting the skills they need to live out productive lives.

So we've accomplished a lot together on behalf of the American people. I could not be prouder of the work that we've done together. There's a lot more that I want to get done this past—this last year. I still am pushing hard and we have, I think, a real opportunity to get criminal justice reform done this year. We have to work together to combat the scourge of opioids and heroin that is spreading through so many of our communities across the country. We still have a lot of work we can do to improve our schools. We can work together to break down rules that stand in the way of building new housing and that keep families from moving to growing, dynamic cities. And as I said last week, we need to keep fighting for a political system that reflects our best selves. And that, by the way, includes making it easier for people to vote, not harder.

So bottom line is, all of you are doing outstanding work. You are in the trenches every single day. You're not always getting a thank you; instead, you're getting why didn't you get that done. [*Laughter*] Or if you got it done, why didn't you get it done earlier. [*Laughter*] And I know the pace is relentless for mayors because people expect to see you every single day, but just in case you're feeling a little underappreciated—[*laughter*—I hope that you understand how heartfelt my words of thanks are. I think that we have seen our cities take leadership and we have seen transformations of communities across this country. And when cities are strong, the states that they're in are strong. And when cities are strong, America is strong. You're helping to fuel that strength.

So thank you so much. I appreciate you. Thank you. Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:02 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Stephanie C. Rawlings-Blake of Baltimore, MD, in her capacity as president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors; and Mayor Stephen Scaffidi of Oak Creek, WI.

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