

look past our divisions to serve the hopes and dreams that we hold in common. We must give life to that fundamental belief that I am my brother's keeper, that I am my sister's keeper.

Scripture tells us, "The word is very near to you. It is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it." Today let us pray for the strength to find the word in our hearts and for the vision to see the America that we can build together as one nation and as one people.

Thank you for your partnership. Thank you for your prayers. May God bless all of you, and may God bless the United States of America.

Remarks to Participants of the Year Up Center in Arlington, Virginia June 19, 2009

The President. How is everybody doing today?

Audience members. Good.

The President. Doing good?

Audience members. Yes.

The President. Well, it is good to see you—it is impressive. First of all, I want to thank Gerald for founding this extraordinary program. Give him a big round of applause. And I want to thank Tynesia for running this thing in an extraordinary way. It seems like she's doing a great job. Give her a big round of applause.

So I am just very excited to be here. I just met four of your fellow Year Up participants, and they represented you very well. And they told me a little bit about the program.

I know that so many of you are doing extraordinary things now, but you've had your bumps in the road, and there have been some tough times. And part of the reason we wanted to come here is that Father's Day is coming up, and a lot of young people in America these days are growing up without fathers in the house, and as a consequence, without direction. And I'm somebody who didn't have a father in my house when I was coming up. And what we wanted to do was to highlight the fact that, first of all, there are all kinds of people who succeed despite the obstacles, but also to remind ourselves that there's so much talent out there that is untapped because people

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:32 a.m. at the J.W. Marriott hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Joshua DuBois, Director, White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships; Rev. Luis Cortes, Jr., founder and president, Esperanza; Adolfo Carrion, Jr., Director, White House Office of Urban Affairs; Supreme Court Associate Justice-designate Sonia Sotomayor; and PO 3d Class Jeonathan E. Zapata, USN.

don't have pathways to success, and they don't have somebody who is giving them a hand and giving them advice and giving them counsel.

And so, number one, we want to send out a message that our parents—that's the first foundation—and fathers especially need to be involved with their children's lives. So the young men who are here today, I just want you to know that even if your father was not there, you can be there for your child when you have a child—and it's not a bad thing to wait to have a child—[laughter]—until you've got your act together.

But the second message was also to say that we as a community can help provide young people with support and direction. And I think that this Year Up program is a terrific example of that.

So I just want to thank all of you for being great model—role models for your peers and for younger people who are coming up; your brothers and sisters, people in the community, they're all watching you. I want to remind you that things are going to get tough at times in your lives, and I don't want anybody here to feel discouraged. Right now the economy is going through a very tough time, which means that the job market is more restrictive, especially for young people entering the market. But the skills that you've obtained and the poise, character that you've been developing is

something that will last you a lifetime, and you will be successful as long as you stick with it.

So we're just very proud of you. That's it from me. Now what I want to do is just open it up and have questions.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:40 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Gerald Chertavian, founder and chief executive officer, Year Up; and Tynesia Boyea Robinson, executive director, Year Up, Washington DC.

Remarks at a Town Hall Meeting on Fatherhood and a Question-and-Answer Session

June 19, 2009

The President. Hello, everybody. Please be seated. Thank you so much. And let me, first of all, thank John and Joe and Juan Carlos and Etan and Mike for sharing their remarkable stories with us. And let me thank Mike Strautmanis for helping to guide us through this process. Where did Mike go? There he is over there.

A couple other people that I want to acknowledge. First of all, our terrific Secretary of Transportation, Ray LaHood, is here in the house. A dear friend of mine, former colleague in the Senate, Senator Evan Bayh is here; where is—Evan go. Okay. Chicago's own, Congressman Danny Davis, from the West Side—where's Danny? He was here a second ago. Give him a round of applause anyway.

And I want to thank kids from the Life Pieces to Masterpieces as well—and Foundry United Methodist Church. Thank you very much for your participation. And I want to thank members of the faith-based advisory council's subcommittee on fatherhood that has helped us to organize these events today.

Good afternoon, everybody. It is wonderful to see you. I see some familiar faces in the house. Rev, how are you doing? It is great to have all of you here today as we gear up to celebrate Father's Day and to recognize the vital role that fathers play in our communities and obviously, in our families.

This town hall marks the beginning of a national conversation that we hope to start about fatherhood and personal responsibility, about how fathers across America are meeting the challenges in their families and communities, and what government can do to support those who are having a difficult time. Today you've had a chance to hear from five of those fathers,

men who are doing an outstanding job of meeting their obligations in their own lives.

We all know the difference that a responsible, committed father like those five gentlemen can make in the life of a child. Fathers are our first teachers and coaches. They're our mentors; they're our role models. They set an example of success, and they push us to succeed, encourage us when we're struggling. And they love us even when we disappoint them, and they stand by us when nobody else will.

And when fathers are absent, when they abandon their responsibilities to

we know the damage that that does to our families. Some of you know the statistics. Children who grow up without fathers are more likely to drop out of school and wind up in prison. They're more likely to have substance abuse problems, run away from home, and become teenage parents themselves.

And I say this as someone who grew up without a father in my own life. Now, I had a heroic mom and wonderful grandparents who helped raise me and my sister, and it's because of them that I'm able to stand here today. But despite all their extraordinary love and attention, that doesn't mean that I didn't feel my father's absence. That's something that leaves a hole in a child's heart that a government can't fill.

Our Government can build the best schools with the best teachers on Earth, but we still need fathers to ensure that kids are coming home and doing their homework and having a book instead of the TV remote every once in a while. Government can put more cops on the streets, but only fathers can make sure that those kids aren't on the streets in the first place. Government can create good jobs, but we need