

an insistence, a demand from parents for excellence in the schools.

And the same thing was true when I went to China. I was talking to the mayor of Shanghai, and I asked him about how he was doing recruiting teachers, given that they've got 25 million people in this one city. He said, "We don't have problems recruiting teachers because teaching is so revered and the pay scales for teachers are actually comparable to doctors and other professions."

That gives you a sense of what's happening around the world. There is a hunger for knowledge, an insistence on excellence, a reverence for science and math and technology and learning. That used to be what we were about. That's what we're going to be about again.

And I have to say that this doesn't get a lot of focus. Not once was I asked about education policy during my trip by the press. And oftentimes events like this get short shrift. They're not what's debated on cable. But this is probably going to make more of a difference in determining how well we do as a country than just about anything else that we do here.

Now, everyone in this room understands how important science and math can be. And it goes beyond the facts in a biology textbook or the questions on an algebra quiz. It's about the ability to understand our world, to harness and train that human capacity to solve problems and think critically, a set of skills that informs the decisions we make throughout our lives.

So yes, improving education in math and science is about producing engineers and researchers and scientists and innovators who are going to help transform our economy and our lives for the better. But it's also about something more. It's about expanding opportunity for all Americans in a world where an education is the key to success. It's about an informed citizenry in an era where many of the problems we face as a Nation are, at root, scientific problems. And it's about the power of science to not only

unlock new discoveries, but to unlock in the minds of our young people a sense of promise, a sense that with some hard work, with effort, they have the potential to achieve extraordinary things.

This is a difficult time in our country, and it would be easy to grow cynical and wonder if America's best days are behind us, especially at a time of economic uncertainty, especially when we've seen so many, from Wall Street to Washington, fail to take responsibility for so long. But I believe we have an opportunity now to move beyond the failures of the recent past and to recapture that spirit of American innovation and optimism.

This Nation wasn't built on greed. It wasn't built on reckless risk. It wasn't built on short-term gains and short-sighted policies. It was forged of stronger stuff, by bold men and women who dared to invent something new or improve something old, who took big chances on big ideas, who believed that in America all things are possible. That's our history. And, if we remain fixed on the work ahead, if we build on the progress we've made today, this is going to be our legacy as well.

So with that, just as proof of the extraordinary promise of American young people, I'd like to invite Steven Harris and Brian Hortelano from Oakton High School to come up here and demonstrate what their team has built. And it's flashing so far. I don't see it whirling. [*Laughter*] Where are they? Give them a big round of applause.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:46 a.m. in the South Court Auditorium of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Adam Savage and Jamie Hyneman, hosts of the Discovery Channel program "Mythbusters"; Dean Kamen, founder, Deka Research & Development; and Mayor Han Zheng of Shanghai, China.

Remarks Following a Cabinet Meeting November 23, 2009

Hello, everybody. I assembled my Cabinet today for updates on the progress we've made

across several areas. Secretary Gates and Secretary Clinton spoke about issues of national

security. Peter Orszag had some discussion of our upcoming budget. And I updated the Cabinet on the progress that we're making on the health insurance reform legislation that's moving its way now through the Senate, and reiterated the urgent need for us to get to the finish line and provide relief, both in terms of costs and the quality of coverage that Americans get—are getting in their health care.

The primary focus of our discussion today, though, it had to do with the same thing that Americans sitting across kitchen tables all across the country are focused on, and that is jobs and the economy. If you look back at where we've been, in the first several months of my administration, because of the steps taken by people like Secretary Geithner and the rest of our economic team, we were able to stabilize the financial system and ensure that the economy didn't slip back into a depression. And we take this for granted now, but it is something that I think all the members of the Cabinet who participated are extremely proud of.

Since that time, we've passed a Recovery Act that's put a middle class tax cut into people's pockets, that has invested in infrastructure all across this country, and put people back to work, and something that isn't noted often enough, has helped stabilize state budgets at a time in which we could have seen hundreds of thousands of layoffs in teachers and police officers and firefighters.

Our economy is growing again for the first time in more than a year, and we know that economic growth is a prerequisite for job growth. But, having said that, what I emphasize today is we cannot sit back and be satisfied, given the extraordinarily high unemployment levels that we've seen. We have only taken the first step in curing our economy and making sure that it is moving on the right track. And I will not rest until businesses are investing again and businesses are hiring again and people have work again.

Now, this is going to be a challenging task. It's challenging because of the extraordinary blow that the financial crisis delivered to the economy as a whole. It is particularly difficult because both the financial sector and the

housing sector were the biggest drivers of economic growth prior to the financial crisis, and so the severity of their pullback means that things are moving slower than we would like them to move.

One of the ironies that we have right now is, is that businesses across sectors are making profits again, but their primary way of making profit has been to cut costs, as opposed to seeing increased demand. And, unfortunately, the huge rise in productivity, which is normally a good thing, in this circumstance means that they have learned to produce the same amount of goods with fewer people. All these present some significant challenges in terms of us creating more jobs in this economy.

But, having said that, something that our economic team emphasized is that there are core strengths to the American economy that will put us in good stead over the long term. Having gone through this very wrenching adjustment, we continue to have the best universities in the world, the best innovation and technologies in the world. We continue to have some of the best workers in the world, the most productive workers in the world. And we have the kind of dynamism and entrepreneurship in our economies that's going to serve us well in the long term. The key is to bridge where we are now to that more prosperous future. And so a lot of the discussion, in a whole range of different sectors, was how do we move that job agendas forward.

For example, in the export area, I just came back from a trip to Asia in which one of my highest priorities was discussing how we can increase exports into that region. If we could just increase our exports by 5 percent into that region, that would mean hundreds of thousands of well paying jobs. And there's no reason that we can't do it. In fact, it turns out that they want our products and they want our technology, but partly because of regulatory restrictions, partly because of currency issues, partly because we just haven't been as aggressive as we need to be, we haven't gotten there.

That's something that we're going to be focusing on, on infrastructure. Although some of the payout extends beyond just a couple of years, us investing now in revamping our

existing infrastructure and then starting to lay the foundation for things like high-speed rail can make all the difference in the world.

And in green technology, we are seeing some terrific ideas that could immediately put people back to work and save consumers money and help with the climate crisis that we have in place.

So, as many of you know, we're going to be having a jobs summit on December 3d. Part of the task of this Cabinet was to generate good ideas in anticipation of that jobs summit. We are going to be bringing together people from all across the country—business, labor, academics, non-for-profits, entrepreneurs, small and large businesses—to explore how we can jumpstart the hiring that typically lags behind economic growth, but we don't want to wait. We want to see if we can accelerate it. And I'm confident that we're going to be able to do it because I've got as good of a Cabinet as I think any President has ever had.

Let me just close by saying this. This is a week to give thanks. And I advised this hard-working Cabinet to get a little bit of rest this week, particularly the people who have been traveling around the globe for—day in and day out and don't know what time zone they're in.

But I think it's also a time to remember that this has been a very difficult year and a lot of people out there are having a very, very tough time. And I indicated to my Cabinet that as hard as they're working and as difficult as the political environment can be sometimes, we are extraordinarily blessed to be in a position where we can make a potential difference in the lives of millions of people. We need to take advantage of that opportunity and redouble our efforts in the months and years to come.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:27 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

Remarks at the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award Ceremony *November 23, 2009*

Thank you. Please, everybody have a seat. Everybody have a seat. What a wonderful evening. Before I begin, let me just acknowledge some folks here in the crowd. First of all, Mrs. Kerry Kennedy, for the great work that she's doing day in, day out, Mr. Philip Johnston, thank you to both of you for helping to organize this tonight. Obviously, I've got to say thanks to my favorite people, Mrs. Robert F. Kennedy, also known as Ethel Kennedy. To Representative Donald M. Payne, Representative Gregory Meeks, and Representative Edward Markey, who are all here, thank you for your attendance and your support of this important award.

You know, every year for 24 years, starting the year this award was established, my friend, Senator Edward "Ted" Kennedy, spoke at this event. And I'm told that he looked forward to it all year, that he relished the chance to shine a bright light on an injustice and on those fighting it and to support them in that fight. He also enjoyed a family reunion. He relished the chance to pay tribute to those carrying on the unfinished work of his brother's life, work that for

nearly half a century in the U.S. Senate he made his own.

And he was pleased that this award honored men and women across the globe doing a wide range of urgent work: fighting to end apartheid, advance democracy, empower minorities and indigenous peoples, promote free speech and elections, and more. Because Ted understood that Bobby's legacy wasn't a devotion to one particular cause or a faith in a certain ideology, but rather, it was a sensibility. A belief that in this world there is right and there is wrong, and it is our job to build our laws and our lives around recognizing the difference.

A sensitivity to injustice so acute that it can't be relieved by the rationalizations that make life comfortable for the rest of us, that others' suffering is not our problem, that the ills of the world are somehow not our concern, a moral orientation that renders certain people constitutionally incapable of remaining a bystander in the face of evil, a sensibility that recognizes the power of all people, however humble their circumstances, to change the course of history,