

The President's Weekly Address September 24, 2011

Over the last few weeks, I've been making the case that we need to act now on the "American Jobs Act," so we can put folks back to work and start building an economy that lasts into the future.

Education is an essential part of this economic agenda. It is an undeniable fact that countries who outeducate us today, will out-compete us tomorrow. Businesses will hire wherever the highly skilled and highly trained workers are located.

But today, our students are sliding against their peers around the globe. Today, our kids trail too many other countries in math and science and reading. As many as a quarter of our students aren't even finishing high school. And we've fallen to 16th in the proportion of our young people with a college degree, even though we know that 60 percent of new jobs in the coming decade will require more than a high school diploma.

What this means is that if we're serious about building an economy that lasts—an economy in which hard work pays off with the opportunity for solid middle class jobs—we had better be serious about education. We have to pick up our game and raise our standards.

As a nation, we have an obligation to make sure that all children have the resources they need to learn: quality schools, good teachers, the latest textbooks, and the right technology. That's why the jobs bill I sent to Congress would put tens of thousands of teachers back to work across the country and modernize at least 35,000 schools. That's why Congress should pass that bill right now.

But money alone won't solve our education problems. We also need reform. We need to make sure that every classroom is a place of high expectations and high performance.

That's been our vision since taking office. And that's why instead of just pouring money into the system that wasn't working, we launched a competition called Race to the Top. To all 50 States, we said, "If you show us the

most innovative plans to improve teacher quality and student achievement, we'll show you the money."

For less than 1 percent of what we spend on education each year, Race to the Top has led States across the country to raise their standards for teaching and learning. These standards were developed not by Washington, but by Republican and Democratic Governors throughout the country. And since then, we have seen what's possible when reform isn't just a top-down mandate, but the work of local teachers and principals, school boards and communities.

That's why in my State of the Union Address this year, I said to Congress, you need to reform the No Child Left Behind law based on the same principles that have guided Race to the Top.

While the goals behind No Child Left Behind were admirable, experience has taught us that the law has some serious flaws that are hurting our children instead of helping them. Teachers are being forced to teach to the test, while subjects like history and science are being squeezed out. And in order to avoid having their schools labeled as failures, some States lowered their standards in a race to the bottom.

These problems have been obvious to parents and educators all over this country for years. But for years, Congress has failed to fix them. So now I will. Our kids only get one shot at a decent education. And they can't afford to wait any longer.

So yesterday I announced that we'll be giving States more flexibility to meet high standards for teaching and learning. It's time for us to let States and schools and teachers come up with innovative ways to give our children the skills they need to compete for the jobs of the future.

This will make a huge difference in the lives of students all across the country. For example, yesterday, I was with Ricci Hall, the principal of a school in Worcester, Massachusetts. Every single student who graduated from Ricci's school in the last 3 years went on to college.

But because they didn't meet the standards of No Child Left Behind, Ricci's school was labeled as failing last year.

That will change because of what we did yesterday. From now on, we'll be able to encourage the progress at schools like Ricci's. From now on, people like John Becker, who teaches at one of the highest performing middle schools in DC, will be able to focus on teaching his fourth graders math in ways that improves their performance instead of just teaching to a test. Superintendents like David Estrop from Ohio will be able to focus on improving teaching and learning in his district instead of spending all his time on bureaucratic mandates from Washington that don't get results.

This isn't just the right thing to do for our kids; it's the right thing to do for our country

and our future. It's time to put our teachers back on the job. It's time to rebuild and modernize our schools. And it's time to raise our standards, up our game, and do everything it takes to prepare our children to succeed in the global economy. Now is the time to once again make our education system the envy of the world.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 4:35 p.m. on September 23 in the Map Room at the White House for broadcast on September 24. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 23, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on September 24.

Remarks at the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Phoenix Awards Dinner

September 24, 2011

Hello, CBC! Thank you so much. Thank you. Please, everybody have a seat. It is wonderful to be with all of you tonight. It's good to be with "the conscience of the Congress." Thank you, Chairman Cleaver and brother Payne, for all that you do each and every day. Thank you, Dr. Elsie Scott, president and CEO of the CBC Foundation, and all of you for your outstanding work with your internship program, which has done so much for so many young people. And I had a chance to meet some of the young people backstage, an incredible, unbelievably impressive group.

You know, being here with all of you, with all the outstanding members of the Congressional Black Caucus, reminds me of a story that one of our friends, a giant of the civil rights movement, Reverend Dr. Joseph Lowery, told one day. Dr. Lowery, I don't think he minds me telling that he turns 90 in a couple weeks. He's been causing a ruckus for about 89 of those years. [*Laughter*]

A few years back, Dr. Lowery and I were together at Brown Chapel AME Church in Selma. [*Applause*] We've got some Selma folks in

the house. And Dr. Lowery stood up in the pulpit and told the congregation the story of Shadrach and Meshach and Abed-nego in the fiery furnace. You know the story: It's about three young men bold enough to stand up for God, even if it meant being thrown in a furnace. And they survived because of their faith and because God showed up in that furnace with them.

Now, Dr. Lowery said that those three young men were a little bit crazy. But there's a difference, he said, between good crazy and bad crazy. Those boys, he said, were good crazy. At the time, I was running for President; it was early in the campaign. Nobody gave me much of a chance. He turned to me from the pulpit and indicated that someone like me running for President, well, that was crazy. [*Laughter*] But he supposed it was good crazy.

He was talking about faith, the belief in things not seen, the belief that if you persevere, a better day lies ahead. And I suppose the reason I enjoy coming to the CBC—what this weekend is all about—is you and me, we're all a little bit crazy, but hopefully, a good kind of