

that I'll always tell you what I think and I'll always tell you where I stand and, most importantly, I will wake up every morning and fight as hard as I know how for you.

Because I see myself in you. In your grandparents, I see my grandparents. In your children, I see Malia and Sasha. I see my own story in your story. And so I've kept that promise, New Orleans. I've been fighting for you. I believe in you.

And if you still believe in me and you're willing to stand with me and fight with me and organize with me and make phone calls with me and knock on doors with me, if you see what I see—a bold, generous, optimistic America where all people have a fair shot at success and

everybody is doing their fair share—I promise you, we will finish what we started and we will remind the world just why it is that the United States of America is the greatest nation on Earth.

God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:49 p.m. at the House of Blues. In his remarks, he referred to his sister Maya Soetoro-Ng, mother-in-law Marian Robinson, and brother-in-law Craig M. Robinson; and Republican Presidential candidate former Gov. W. Mitt Romney of Massachusetts. He also referred to S. 3412.

Remarks at the National Urban League Conference in New Orleans July 25, 2012

The President. Hello, Urban League! Thank you. It is good to be with the Urban League. And it's good to be in the Big Easy.

Now, I don't know if the fact that this is called the Morial Convention Center had anything to do with folks coming down to New Orleans—[laughter]—but it is good to be with all of you. And I'm glad I caught you at the beginning of the conference, before Bourbon Street has a chance to take a toll on you. [Laughter] All right. You all stay out of trouble now. [Laughter]

Everybody, please have a seat. Have a seat, have a seat.

Audience member. Four more years!

The President. A couple of people that I want to acknowledge. Obviously, first of all, I want to acknowledge your outstanding president and CEO who has shown such extraordinary leadership for so many years, Marc Morial. Just like we've got an outstanding former mayor of New Orleans, we've also got the outstanding current mayor of New Orleans: Mitch Landrieu is in the house. Fine young Congressman from this area, Cedric Richmond is here. And one of the best mayors in the country, we're glad he came down from his hometown of Philadelphia, Mayor Michael Nutter is in the house.

And all of you are here, and I am grateful for it. And we love the young people who are in the house. Mitch, don't you—I wasn't referring to you, man, I was talking to those folks over there. [Laughter] Mitch is all waving, "Thank you." [Laughter]

For nearly a century, the National Urban League has been inspiring people of every race and every religion and every walk of life to reach for the dream that lies at the heart of our founding: the promise that no matter who you are, no matter what you look like, no matter where you come from, no matter how modest your beginnings, no matter what the circumstances of your birth, here in America, you can make it if you try.

Of course, this dream has never come easy. That's why the Urban League was formed. In the aftermath of the Civil War, with the South in the grips of Jim Crow, the waves of men and women who traveled north to urban centers discovered that even in their new homes, opportunity was not guaranteed. It was something you had to work for, something you had to fight for, not just on your own, but side by side with people who believed in that same dream.

And so the White widow of a railroad tycoon and a Black social worker from Arkansas

founded what would become the Urban League, to strengthen our cities and our communities brick by brick and block by block and neighborhood by neighborhood, life by life.

Decades later, I arrived in one of those cities: my hometown of Chicago. [*Applause*] South Side! And I was driven by this same cause. Like many of my classmates, I felt, I understood, the pull of a hefty paycheck that might come from a more conventional job. But ultimately, the pull to serve was even stronger.

So I moved to the South Side of Chicago, and I took a job with a group of churches, mostly Catholic parishes, working to help families who had no place to turn when the local steel plants shut down, and when panic-peddling had led to enormous turnover in these communities. And we worked with laypeople and local leaders to rebuild neighborhoods and improve schools and, most of all, to broaden opportunity for young people, too many who were at risk.

And I confess that progress didn't come quickly and it did not come easily. Sometimes, it didn't come at all. There were times where I thought about giving up and moving on. But what kept me going, day in and day out, was the same thing that has sustained the Urban League all these years, the same thing that sustains all of you, and that is the belief that in America, change is always possible; that our Union may not be perfect, but it is perfectible; that we can strive over time through effort and sweat and blood and tears until it is the place we imagine.

It may come in fits and starts, at a pace that can be slow and frustrating. But if we are willing to push through all the doubt and the cynicism and the weariness, then, yes, we can form that more perfect Union.

Now, the people I worked with in those early days in Chicago, they were looking for the same thing that Americans everywhere aspire to. We're not a nation of people who are looking for handouts. We certainly don't like bailouts. [*Laughter*] We don't believe government should be in the business of helping people who refuse to help themselves, and we recognize not every government program works. But

we do expect hard work to pay off. We do expect responsibility to be rewarded. We do expect that if you put in enough effort, you should be able to find a job that pays the bills. You should be able to own a home you call your own. You should be able to retire in dignity and respect. You should be able to afford the security of health care, and you should be able to give your kids the best education possible.

That idea that everybody should have a fair shot, not just some—that this country is special because it has grown this magnificent middle class and has provided ladders of access for those striving to get into the middle class—that's the idea that drove me. That's the idea that has driven the Urban League. That idea that everyone should have equal opportunity, that's what brought me to Chicago. That belief that this country works best when we are growing a strong middle class and prosperity is broad based, that's what led me into politics. And it is those values that have guided every decision that I have made as President of the United States.

Now, today, we're battling our way back from a once-in-a-lifetime economic crisis. And make no mistake, we've made progress in that fight. When I took office, we were losing hundreds of thousands of jobs a month. Our auto industry was on the brinks of collapse. Factories were boarding up their windows. We'd gone through almost a decade in which job growth had been sluggish, incomes had declined, costs were going up, all culminating in the financial system coming close to a breakdown.

Today, 3½ years later, we've had 28 straight months of private sector job growth; 3½ years later, the auto industry has come roaring back; 3½ years later, companies are beginning to bring thousands of jobs back to American soil.

We still have much more work to do. There's still too many out of work, too many homes underwater, too many Americans struggling to stay afloat. So the greater challenge that faces us is not just going back to where we were back in 2007, not just settling to get back to where we were before the crisis hit. Our task is to return to an America that is thriving and

growing out from our middle class, where hard work pays off, where you can make it if you try.

And, Urban League, I want you to know, what's holding us back from meeting these challenges is not a lack of ideas or solutions. I have no patience with people who say our best days are behind us, because the fact of the matter is we still have the best workers in the world, the best universities in the world, the best research facilities in the world, the most entrepreneurial culture in the world. We have all the ingredients to make the 21st century the American century just like the 20th.

What's holding us back is a stalemate in Washington between two fundamentally different views about which path we should take as a country. And it's up to the American people to decide what direction we should go.

Let me tell you what I believe. I believe that strong communities are places that attract the best jobs and the newest businesses. And you don't build that kind of community by giving tax breaks to companies that are shipping jobs overseas. You build it by giving tax breaks to companies that create jobs in Detroit and in Cleveland and in Chicago and right here in New Orleans, right here in America, using American workers, making American products that we sell around the world, stamped with three proud words: Made in America.

You build it by investing in America's manufacturing base and providing the dollars for research so that we have the most advanced products in the world. You do it by investing in small businesses, the way we've provided 18 tax breaks to small businesses since I've been in office. And if you're a company that wants to relocate in a community that's been particularly hard hit when a factory left town, I believe you should get help financing that new plant or equipment or training for your workers, because we can't leave anybody behind if we want to grow America the way it can grow.

We also believe that every entrepreneur should have the chance to start a business, no matter who you are, no matter what you look like. That's why we've supported financing and assistance and exporting to small businesses across the board. That's why we've helped Afri-

can American businesses and minority-owned businesses and women-owned businesses gain access to more than \$7 billion in contracts and financing that allowed them to grow and create jobs.

That's why we've emphasized helping our veterans create small businesses, because if they fought for us, they shouldn't have to fight to get financing when they get home. They shouldn't have to fight for a job when they come home. They shouldn't have to fight for a roof over their heads when they come home. We should honor them the way they've honored us with their service.

I believe strong communities are places where people can afford to buy what their local businesses sell. So I ran for President promising to cut taxes for the middle class, and regardless of what you hear during silly political season, I have kept that promise. Today, taxes are \$3,600 lower for the typical family than they were when I came into office.

Just a few hours ago, the Senate moved forward a bill that we had promoted to keep middle class tax cuts for 98 percent of Americans next year. I will add that we didn't get a lot of Republican votes, but that's okay, they've got time. We passed it through the Senate, and now is the time for the House to do the same. They should not be holding middle class tax cuts hostage just to get more tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires. At a time when so many people who have a job can barely keep up with their bills, we don't need another trillion-dollar tax cut for folks like me. We need tax cuts for working Americans, not for folks who don't need it and weren't even asking for it.

Millions of Americans—including more than 2 million African American families—are better off thanks to our extension of the child-care tax credit and the earned-income tax credit, because nobody who works hard in America should be poor in America. That's how strong communities are built. And by the way when working folks have money in their pockets, businesses do well because they've got customers, and all of us grow. That's been the history of this country.

I believe strong communities are built on strong schools. If this country is about anything, it's about passing on greater opportunity to the next generation. And we know that has to start before a child even walks into the classroom. It starts at home with parents who are willing to read to their children and spend time with their children and instill a sense of curiosity and love of learning and a belief in excellence that will last a lifetime.

But it also begins with an early childhood education, which is why we've invested more in childcare, and in programs like Early Head Start and Head Start that help prepare our young people for success. It's the right thing to do for America.

Our education policy hasn't just been based on more money, we've also called for real reform. So we challenged every State in the country to raise their standards for teaching and for learning. And 3 years later, nearly every State has answered the call. We have seen the biggest transformation in terms of school reform in a generation, and we've helped some of the country's lowest performing schools make real gains in reading and math, including here in New Orleans.

We've made it our mission to make a higher education more affordable for every American who wants to go to school. That's why we fought to extend our college tuition tax credit for working families, saving millions of families thousands of dollars.

That's why we've fought to make college more affordable for an additional 200,000 African American students by increasing Pell grants. That's why we've strengthened this Nation's commitment to our community colleges and to our HBCUs.

That's why tomorrow I'm establishing the first-ever White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans, so that every child has greater access to a complete and competitive education from the time they're born all through the time they get a career.

And that's why we're pushing all colleges and universities to cut their costs, because we can't keep asking taxpayers to subsidize sky-

rocketing tuition. A higher education in the 21st century cannot be a luxury. It is a vital necessity that every American should be able to afford. I want all these young people to be getting a higher education, and I don't want them loaded up with tens of thousands of dollars of debt just to get an education. That's how we make America great.

Of course, that means all of you all have got to hit the books. [*Laughter*] I'm just saying. Don't cheer, and then you didn't do your homework. [*Laughter*] Because that's part of the bargain, that's part of the bargain: America says we will give you opportunity, but you've got to earn your success.

You're competing against young people in Beijing and Bangalore. They're not hanging out. [*Laughter*] They're not getting over. They're not playing video games. They're not watching "Real Housewives." [*Laughter*] I'm just saying. It's a two-way street. You've got to earn success.

That wasn't in my prepared remarks. [*Laughter*] But I'm just saying.

I believe strong communities are places where you and your family can work and save and buy your home. That's why we've helped more than a million responsible homeowners—these are folks who were making their payments—refinance their mortgages at these historically low rates, saving thousands of dollars every year. Because people who did everything right shouldn't pay the price for somebody else's irresponsibility.

So now we want to expand that refinancing opportunity to every homeowner who's making their payments on time.

And while we're at it, let's put construction workers back on the job, because they've been hit by the housing bubble bursting. Let's put them back on the job not only rebuilding roads and bridges and ports, but also rehabilitating homes in communities that have been hit by foreclosures, businesses that have been hit hardest by the housing crisis. That creates jobs. It raises property values, and it strengthens the economy of the entire nation.

Strong communities are healthy communities. Because we believe that in the richest na-

tion on Earth, you shouldn't go broke when you get sick. And after a century of trying and a decision now from the highest court in the land, health care reform is here to stay. We're moving forward.

Insurance companies will no longer be able to discriminate against those who are sick. Prescription drug prices will be lower for our seniors. We're going to close that doughnut hole. Young people will be able to stay on their parent's insurance until they're 26 years old. Thirty million Americans without health insurance will finally know the security of affordable care.

We'll improve any aspect of this law—and any recommendations and suggestions that those who actually know the health care system and aren't just playing politics put forward. But we're going to implement this law and America is going to be better for it.

Now, I've got to say that I recognize we are in political season. But the Urban League understands that your mission transcends politics. Good jobs, quality schools, affordable health care, affordable housing—these are all the pillars upon which communities are built. And yet we've been reminded recently that all this matters little if these young people can't walk the streets of their neighborhood safely, if we can't send our kids to school without worrying they might get shot, if they can't go to the movies without fear of violence lurking in the shadows.

Our hearts break for the victims of the massacre in Aurora. We pray for those who were lost, and we pray for those who loved them. We pray for those who are recovering with courage and with hope. And we also pray for those who succumb to the less-publicized acts of violence that plague our communities in so many cities across the country every single day. We can't forget about that.

Every day—in fact, every day and a half, the number of young people we lose to violence is about the same as the number of people we lost in that movie theater. For every Columbine or Virginia Tech, there are dozens gunned down on the streets of Chicago and Atlanta, and here in New Orleans. For every Tucson or

Aurora, there is daily heartbreak over young Americans shot in Milwaukee or Cleveland. Violence plagues the biggest cities, but it also plagues the smallest towns. It claims the lives of Americans of different ages and different races, and it's tied together by the fact that these young people had dreams and had futures that were cut tragically short.

And when there is an extraordinarily heartbreaking tragedy like the one we saw, there's always an outcry immediately after for action. And there's talk of new reforms, and there's talk of new legislation. And too often, those efforts are defeated by politics and by lobbying and eventually by the pull of our collective attention elsewhere.

But what I said in the wake of Tucson was we were going to stay on this persistently. So we've been able to take some actions on our own, recognizing that it's not always easy to get things through Congress these days. The background checks conducted on those looking to purchase firearms are now more thorough and more complete. Instead of just throwing more money at the problem of violence, the Federal Government is now in the trenches with communities and schools and law enforcement and faith-based institutions, with outstanding mayors like Mayor Nutter and Mayor Landrieu, recognizing that we are stronger when we work together.

So in cities like New Orleans, we're partnering with local officials to reduce crime, using best practices. And in places like Boston and Chicago, we've been able to help connect more young people to summer jobs so that they spend less time on the streets. In cities like Detroit and Salinas, we're helping communities set up youth prevention and intervention programs that steer young people away from a life of gang violence and towards the safety and promise of a classroom.

But even though we've taken these actions, they're not enough. Other steps to reduce violence have been met with opposition in Congress. This has been true for some time, particularly when it touches on the issues of guns. And I, like most Americans, believe that the Second Amendment guarantees an individual

the right to bear arms. And we recognize the traditions of gun ownership that passed on from generation to generation, that hunting and shooting are part of a cherished national heritage.

But I also believe that a lot of gun owners would agree that AK-47s belong in the hands of soldiers, not in the hands of criminals, that they belong on the battlefield of war, not on the streets of our cities. I believe the majority of gun owners would agree that we should do everything possible to prevent criminals and fugitives from purchasing weapons, that we should check someone's criminal record before they can check out a gun seller, that a mentally unbalanced individual should not be able to get his hands on a gun so easily. These steps shouldn't be controversial. They should be common sense.

So I'm going to continue to work with members of both parties, and with religious groups and with civic organizations, to arrive at a consensus around violence reduction, not just of gun violence, but violence at every level, on every step, looking at everything we can do to reduce violence and keep our children safe, from improving mental health services for troubled youth to instituting more effective community policing strategies. We should leave no stone unturned and recognize that we have no greater mission as a country than keeping our young people safe.

And as we do so, as we convene these conversations, let's be clear: Even as we debate government's role, we have to understand that when a child opens fire on another child, there's a hole in that child's heart that government alone can't fill. It's got to be up to us, as parents and as neighbors and as teachers and as mentors, to make sure our young people don't have that void inside them.

It's up to us to spend more time with them, to pay more attention to them, to show them more love so that they learn to love themselves, so that they learn to love one another, so that they grow up knowing what it is to walk a mile in somebody else's shoes and to view the world through somebody else's eyes. It's up to us to provide the path toward a life worth living, to-

ward a future that holds greater possibility than taking offense because somebody stepped on your sneakers.

That's the difference that we can make in our children's lives and in the lives of our communities. That's the legacy we must leave for the next generation.

Now, this will not be easy. Even though it's called the Big Easy, this proud city and those who call it home, they know something about hardship. They've been battered again and again in this new century: one of the worst natural disasters in our history, the worst environmental disaster in our history, the worst economic crisis most of us have ever known. So sometimes being from the Big Easy means knowing hardship and heartbreak.

But what this city also knows is resilience and determination and heroism. That's one of the reasons it is one of America's jewels. It's quintessentially American because of its resilience.

There is no shortage of citizens in this city who's stepped up in the darkest of times. And one person I want to end with is somebody that many of you know, the superintendent of schools in St. Bernard's Parish, Doris Voitier. Now, when Katrina's waters rose, Doris and the faculty and staff of Chalmette High School saved the lives of hundreds of their neighbors, many of them old and sick, by moving them to shelter in the school's second floor.

Two days later, they led 1,200 people to safety. The day after that, with her community in ruins, the superintendent was on her way to Baton Rouge to make sure her schools would open that fall. "Failure is not an option" became her motto. When some government officials gave her the runaround, she plowed ahead on her own: secured loans, finding portable classrooms and books, and doing everything it took to make sure her kids—our kids—could return to some semblance of normalcy.

When an official told her a gasline wouldn't be repaired in time for school to reopen and that her kids might have to eat MREs, she hired a local restaurant owner to cook hot lunches on a barge and sent FEMA the bill. On the first day of school, less than 3 months

after Katrina swept ashore, she heard a young child, who'd endured nearly 3 months of suffering and hardship, yell out loud: "Real food! Real food!"

Of that first night, she said: "There were no riots; there were no disruptions; there were just hundreds of people just like you and the person sitting next to you, in the blink of an eye, having lost everything they had worked for over their entire lifetimes, who now looked to us for rescue. And we accepted that responsibility because that's what school people do."

Now, obviously, the superintendent is an exceptional educator and an exceptional citizen. But as I've traveled around the country, what I've discovered is that's not just what school people do. That's not—that's what Americans do. That's what Americans, at their best, do. When I traveled to Joplin, Missouri, that's what folks in Joplin do. When I go to Aurora, that's what people in Colorado do. In urban communities all across America, that's what you do.

For more than two centuries, our journey has never been easy, and our victories have never come quickly. And we have faced our share of struggles and setbacks and climbs that have seemed too steep, just like we do today. But we know what we're fighting for. We can see the America we believe in: a country where

everybody gets a fair shot and everybody is doing their fair share, where everybody is playing by the same set of rules. And if we don't keep fighting as hard as we know how for that America, if we don't keep fighting for better jobs and better schools and a better future, who will?

That's our challenge. We don't quit. Folks in New Orleans didn't quit. Americans don't quit. We accept responsibility. We keep on going. We keep marching. We keep moving forward. Failure is not an option. This is not a time for cynics. It is not a time for doubters. It is time for believers. It is time for folks who have faith in the future.

I still believe in you. And if you still believe in me, I ask you to stand with me, march with me, fight with me. And as I do, I promise we will finish what we started, turn this economy around, seize our future, and remind the world why the United States of America is the greatest nation on Earth.

Thank you, Urban League. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7 p.m. at the Ernest M. Morial Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to S. 3412; and Executive Order 13621, which is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Remarks Prior to a Cabinet Meeting and an Exchange With Reporters July 26, 2012

The President. Well, this is a good opportunity for me to bring my Cabinet together to thank them from—for the extraordinary work that they're doing on a whole range of fronts.

You've got Tom Vilsack working very hard to make sure that farmers and ranchers are getting help at a time of devastating drought. You have Secretary Clinton who has been logging more miles than any Secretary of State in history, dealing with a whole range of problems and opportunities around the globe. Obviously, we're going to be focusing a lot on the situation in Syria and what we can do there to make sure that we reduce the bloodshed.

But a whole range of Cabinet members, and obviously my administration, is focusing on our economy and how do we make sure that this is an economy in which people who work hard, who act responsibly, can get ahead.

This is a particular challenge right now. We're seeing some of the weaknesses in Europe, and it is a perfect time for us to focus on what are steps we can take now—not later, not a year from now, but right now—to strengthen the middle class, put more people back to work, provide business greater certainty.

And yesterday the Senate voted to ensure that 98 percent of Americans don't see their taxes go up next year, that 97 percent of small