

shelter by themselves. They could have focused on their own safety, on their own well-being. But they didn't. They gave their lives to protect the precious children in their care. They gave all they had for the most innocent and helpless among us.

And that's what we honor today: the courageous heart, the selfless spirit, the inspiring actions of extraordinary Americans, extraordinary citizens.

We are a nation of 315 million people. Out of all these folks, around 6,000 were nominated for this medal. And today you're the ones receiving it not just for what you do, but for what you represent: for the shining example that you set every single day and the inspiration that you give each of us as fellow citizens, including your President.

So congratulations to the recipients. And now I would like our Military Aide to read the citations.

[At this point, Lt. Col. Owen G. Ray, USA, Army Aide to the President, read the citations. The President then presented the medals, assisted by Maj. Gary Marlowe, USAF, Air Force Aide to the President.]

The President. Let me close by just saying a few words of thanks. First of all, to Wendy and all the people at the Corporation for National and Community Service, thank you for all that you do to make our communities and our country stronger. We're very grateful.

To those who nominated these outstanding individuals, thank you for taking the time to

share their stories. The competition was stiff. And your words gave life to their work.

To all the family and friends who are here celebrating with the winners, thank you for the love and support that you provide to them every single day, because they couldn't do what they do unless somebody had that love and support for them. I know the awardees would agree that this honor belongs not just to themselves, but to everybody who supports them.

And finally, to the winners of this year's Citizens Medal, we want to congratulate you once again. A special note just to the families who are here from Sandy Hook: We are so blessed to be with you. I've gotten to know many of you during the course of some very difficult weeks. And your courage and love for each other and your communities shines through every single day. And we could not be more blessed and grateful for your loved ones who gave everything they had on behalf of our kids.

On behalf of a grateful nation, thanks to all of you for showing us what it means to be a citizen of this country that we love. Hopefully, we will all draw inspiration from this and remember why it is that we're lucky to be living in the greatest nation on Earth. Thank you all for coming, and enjoy the reception.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:30 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former Sen. Harris L. Wofford; Janice Y. Jackson, creator and program director, Women Embracing Abilities Now; and Wendy Spencer, chair, Corporation for National and Community Service.

Remarks at the Hyde Park Academy High School in Chicago, Illinois February 15, 2013

The President. Hey, Chicago! Hello, Chicago! Hello, everybody. Hello, Hyde Park. It is good to be home. It is good to be home. Everybody, have a seat. You all relax. It's just me. You all know me. It is good to be back home.

A couple of people I want to acknowledge: First of all, I want to thank your mayor, my great friend, Rahm Emanuel, for his outstanding leadership of the city and his kind introduc-

tion. I want to thank everybody here at Hyde Park Academy for welcoming me here today.

I want to acknowledge your principal and your assistant principal—although, they really make me feel old, because when I saw them—[laughter]—where are they? Where are they? Stand up, stand up. They are doing outstanding work. We're very, very proud of them. But you do make me feel old. Sit down. [Laughter]

A couple other people I want to acknowledge: Governor Pat Quinn is here doing great work down in Springfield. My great friend and senior Senator, Dick Durbin is in the house. Congressman Bobby Rush is here; we're in his district. Attorney General—and former seat-mate of mine when I was in the State senate—Lisa Madigan; County Board President—used to be my alderwoman—Tony Preckwinkle in the house.

And I've got—I see a lot of reverend clergy here, but I'm not going to mention them, because if I miss one, I'm in trouble. [Laughter] They're all friends of mine. They've been knowing me.

You know, some people may not know this, but obviously, this is my old neighborhood. I used to teach right around the corner. This is where Michelle and I met, where we fell in love.

Audience members. Aww!

The President. This is where we raised our daughters, in a house just about a mile away from here—less than a mile. And that's really what I've come here to talk about today: raising our kids.

Audience members. We love you!

The President. I love you too. I love you too.

I'm here to make sure that we talk about and then work towards giving every child every chance in life, building stronger communities and new ladders of opportunity that they can climb into the middle class and beyond, and most importantly, keeping them safe from harm.

Michelle was born and raised here: a proud daughter of the South Side. Last weekend, she came home, but it was to attend the funeral of Hadiya Pendleton. And Hadiya's parents, by the way, are here, and I want to just acknowledge them. They are just wonderful, wonderful people.

And as you know, this week, in my State of the Union, I talked about Hadiya on Tuesday night and the fact that unfortunately what happened to Hadiya is not unique. It's not unique to Chicago. It's not unique to this country. Too many of our children are being taken away from us.

Two months ago, America mourned 26 innocent first-graders and their educators in Newtown. And today I had the high honor of giving the highest civilian award I can give to the parent—or the families of the educators who had been killed in Newtown. And there was something profound and uniquely heart-breaking and tragic, obviously, about a group of 6-year-olds being killed. But last year, there were 443 murders with a firearm on the streets of this city, and 65 of those victims were 18 and under. So that's the equivalent of a Newtown every 4 months.

And that's precisely why the overwhelming majority of Americans are asking for some commonsense proposals to make it harder for criminals to get their hands on a gun. And as I said on Tuesday night, I recognize not everybody agrees with every issue. There are regional differences. The experience of gun ownership is different in urban areas than it is in rural areas, different from upstate and downstate Illinois. But these proposals deserve a vote in Congress. They deserve a vote. [Applause] They deserve a vote. And I want to thank those Members of Congress who are working together in a serious way to try to address this issue.

But I've also said no law or set of laws can prevent every senseless act of violence in this country. When a child opens fire on another child, there's a hole in that child's heart that government can't fill; only community and parents and teachers and clergy can fill that hole. In too many neighborhoods today—whether here in Chicago or the farthest reaches of rural America—it can feel like for a lot of young people the future only extends to the next street corner or the outskirts of town, that no matter how much you work or how hard you try, your destiny was determined the moment you were born. There are entire neighborhoods where young people, they don't see an example of somebody succeeding. And for a lot of young boys and young men, in particular, they don't see an example of fathers or grandfathers, uncles, who are in a position to support families and be held up and respected.

And so that means that this is not just a gun issue, it's also an issue of the kinds of commu-

nities that we're building. And for that, we all share a responsibility, as citizens, to fix it. We all share a responsibility to move this country closer to our founding vision that no matter who you are or where you come from, here in America, you can decide your own destiny. You can succeed if you work hard and fulfill your responsibilities.

Now, that means we've got to grow our economy and create more good jobs. It means we've got to equip every American with the skills and the training to fill those jobs. And it means we've got to rebuild ladders of opportunity for everybody willing to climb them.

Now, that starts at home. There's no more important ingredient for success, nothing that would be more important for us reducing violence than strong, stable families, which means we should do more to promote marriage and encourage fatherhood. Don't get me wrong: As the son of a single mom, who gave everything she had to raise me with the help of my grandparents, I turned out okay. [*Laughter*] But—no, no, but I think it's—so we've got single moms out here, they're heroic in what they're doing, and we are so proud of them. But at the same time, I wish I had had a father who was around and involved. Loving, supportive parents—and by the way, that's all kinds of parents. That includes foster parents, and that includes grandparents and extended families; it includes gay or straight parents.

Those parents—those parents supporting kids—that's the single most important thing. Unconditional love for your child, that makes a difference. If a child grows up with parents who have work and have some education and can be role models and can teach integrity and responsibility and discipline and delayed gratification—all those things give a child the kind of foundation that allows them to say, my future, I can make it what I want. And we've got to make sure that every child has that, and in some cases, we may have to fill the gap and the void if children don't have that.

So we should encourage marriage by removing the financial disincentives for couples who love one another, but may find it financially disadvantageous if they get married. We

should reform our child support laws to get more men working and engaged with their children. And my administration will continue to work with the faith community and the private sector this year on a campaign to encourage strong parenting and fatherhood. Because what makes you a man is not the ability to make a child, it's the courage to raise one.

We also know, though, that there is no surer path to success in the middle class than a good education. And what we now know is that that has to begin in the earliest years. Study after study shows that the earlier a child starts learning, the more likely they are to succeed: the more likely they are to do well at Hyde Park Academy; the more likely they are to graduate; the more likely they are to get a good job; the more likely they are to form stable families and then be able to raise children themselves who get off to a good start.

Chicago already has a competition, thanks to what the mayor is doing, that rewards the best preschools in the city; so Rahm has already prioritized this. But what I've also done is say, let's give every child across America access to high-quality, public preschool. Every child, not just some. Every dollar we put into early childhood education can save \$7 down the road by boosting graduation rates, reducing teen pregnancy, reducing violent crime, reducing the welfare rolls, making sure that folks who have work, now they're paying taxes. All this stuff pays back huge dividends if we make the investment. So let's make this happen. Let's make sure every child has the chance they deserve.

As kids go through school, we'll recruit new math and science teachers to make sure that they've got the skills that the future demands. We'll help more young people in low-income neighborhoods get summer jobs. We'll redesign our high schools and encourage our kids to stay in high school, so that the diploma they get leads directly to a good job once they graduate.

Right here in Chicago, five new high schools have partnered with companies and community colleges to prepare our kids with the skills that businesses are looking for right now. And your College to Careers program helps community college students get access to the same

kinds of real-world experiences. So we know what works. Let's just do it in more places. Let's reach more young people. Let's give more kids a chance.

So we know how important families are. We know how important education is. We recognize that government alone can't solve these problems of violence and poverty, that everybody has to be involved. But we also have to remember that the broader economic environment of communities is critical as well. For example, we need to make sure that folks who are working now, often in the hardest jobs, see their work rewarded with wages that allow them to raise a family without falling into poverty.

Today, a family with two kids that works hard and relies on a minimum wage salary still lives below the poverty line. That's wrong, and we should fix it. We should reward an honest day's work with honest wages. And that's why we should raise the minimum wage to \$9 an hour and make it a wage you can live on.

And even though some cities have bounced back pretty quickly from the recession, we know that there are communities and neighborhoods within cities or in small towns that haven't bounced back. Cities like Chicago are ringed with former factory towns that never came back all the way from plants packing up; there are pockets of poverty where young adults are still looking for their first job.

And that's why on Tuesday, I announced—and that's part of what I want to focus on here in Chicago and across the country—is my intention to partner with 20 of the hardest hit communities in America to get them back in the game—get them back in the game.

First of all, we'll work with local leaders to cut through redtape and improve things like public safety and education and housing. And we'll bring all the resources to bear in a coordinated fashion so that we can get that tipping point where suddenly a community starts feeling like things are changing and we can come back.

Second of all, if you're willing to play a role in a child's education, then we'll help you reform your schools. We want to seed more and

more partnerships of the kind that Rahm is trying to set up.

Third, we're going to help bring jobs and growth to hard-hit neighborhoods by giving tax breaks to business owners who invest and hire in those neighborhoods.

Fourth, and specific to the issue of violence, because it's very hard to develop economically if people don't feel safe. If they don't feel like they can walk down the street and shop at a store without getting hit over the head or worse, then commerce dries up, businesses don't want to locate, families move out, you get into the wrong cycle. So we're going to target neighborhoods struggling to deal with violent crime and help them reduce that violence in ways that have been proven to work. And I know this is a priority of your mayor's; it's going to be a priority of mine.

And finally, we're going to keep working in communities all across the country, including here in Chicago, to replace rundown public housing that doesn't offer much hope or safety with new, healthy homes for low- and moderate-income families.

And here in Woodlawn, you've seen some of the progress that we can make when we come together to rebuild our neighborhoods, and attract new businesses and improve our schools. Woodlawn is not all the way where it needs to be, but thanks to wonderful institutions like Apostolic Church, we've made great progress.

So we want to help more communities follow your example. And let's go even farther by offering incentives to companies that hire unemployed Americans who have got what it takes to fill a job opening, but they may have been out of work so long that nobody is willing to give them a chance right now. Let's put our people back to work rebuilding vacant homes in need of repair. Young people can get experience, apprenticeships, learn a trade. And we're removing blight from our community.

If we gather together what works, we can extend more ladders of opportunity for anybody who's working to build a strong, middle class life for themselves. Because in America, your destiny shouldn't be determined by where you live, where you were born. It should be deter-

mined by how big you're willing to dream, how much effort and sweat and tears you're willing to put in to realizing that dream.

When I first moved to Chicago, before any of the students in this room were born—[laughter]—and a whole lot of people who are in the audience remember me from those days—I lived in a community on the South Side right up the block, but I also worked further south where communities had been devastated by some of the steel plants closing. And my job was to work with churches and laypeople and local leaders to rebuild neighborhoods and improve schools and help young people who felt like they had nowhere to turn.

And those of you who worked with me, Reverend Love, you remember, it wasn't easy. Progress didn't come quickly. Sometimes, I got so discouraged I thought about just giving up. But what kept me going was the belief that with enough determination and effort and persistence and perseverance, change is always possible; that we may not be able to help everybody, but if we help a few, then that propels progress forward. We may not be able to save every child from gun violence, but if we save a few, that starts changing the atmosphere in our communities. We may not be able to get everybody a job right away, but if we get a few folks a job, then everybody starts feeling a little more hopeful and a little more encouraged. Neighborhood by neighborhood, one block by one block, one family at a time.

Now, this is what I had a chance to talk about when I met with some young men from Hyde Park Academy who were participating in this BAM program. Where are the guys I talked to? Stand up you all, so we can all see you guys. So these are some—these are all some exceptional young men, and I couldn't be prouder of them. And the reason I'm proud of them is because a lot of them have had some issues. That's part of the reason why you guys are in the program. [Laughter]

But what I explained to them was, I had issues too when I was their age. I just had an environment that was a little more forgiving. So when I screwed up, the consequences weren't as high as when kids on the South Side screw

up. So I had more of a safety net. But these guys are no different than me, and we had that conversation about what does it take to change. And the same thing that it takes for us individually to change, I said to them, well, that's what it takes for communities to change. That's what it takes for countries to change. It's not easy.

But it does require us, first of all, having a vision about where we want to be. It requires us recognizing that it will be hard work getting there. It requires us being able to overcome and persevere in the face of roadblocks and disappointments and failures. It requires us reflecting internally about who we are and what we believe in and facing up to our own fears and insecurities and admitting when we're wrong. And that same thing that we have to do in our individual lives that these guys talked about, that's what we have to do for our communities. And it will not be easy, but it can be done.

When Hadiya Pendleton and her classmates visited Washington 3 weeks ago, they spent time visiting the monuments, including the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial just off the National Mall. And that memorial stands as a tribute to everything Dr. King achieved in his lifetime. But it also reminds us of how hard that work was and how many disappointments he experienced. He was here in Chicago fighting poverty, and just like a lot of us, there were times where he felt like he was losing hope. So, in some ways, that memorial is a testament not to work that's completed, but it's a testament to the work that remains unfinished.

His goal was to free us not only from the shackles of discrimination, but from the shadow of poverty that haunts too many of our communities, the self-destructive impulses and the mindless violence that claims so many lives of so many innocent young people.

These are difficult challenges. No solution we offer will be perfect. But perfection has never been our goal. Our goal has been to try and make whatever difference we can. Our goal has been to engage in the hard, but necessary work of bringing America one step closer to the Nation we know we can be.

If we do that, if we're striving with every fiber of our being to strengthen our middle class,

to extend ladders of opportunity for everybody who is trying to—as hard as they can—to create a better life for themselves; if we do everything in our power to keep our children safe from harm; if we’re fulfilling our obligations to one another and to future generations; if we make that effort, then I’m confident, I’m confident that we will write the next great chapter in our American story. I’m not going to be able to do it by myself, though. Nobody can. We’re going to have to do it together.

The President’s Weekly Address *February 16, 2013*

This week, I’ve been traveling across the country, from North Carolina to Georgia to here at Hyde Park Academy in my hometown of Chicago, talking with folks about the important task that I laid out in my State of the Union Address: reigniting the true engine of America’s economic growth, a rising, thriving, middle class.

Every day, we should ask ourselves three questions: How do we bring good jobs to America? How do we equip people with the skills those jobs require? And how do we make sure your hard work leads to a decent living?

I believe all that starts by making America a magnet for new jobs and manufacturing. After shedding jobs for more than 10 years, our manufacturers have added about 500,000 jobs over the past 3. What we need to do now is simple: We need to accelerate that trend. We need to launch manufacturing hubs across the country that will transform hard hit regions into global centers of high-tech jobs and manufacturing. We need to make our Tax Code more competitive, ending tax breaks for companies that ship jobs overseas and rewarding companies that create jobs here at home. And we need to invest in the research and technology that will allow us to harness more of our energy and put more people back to work repairing our crumbling roads and bridges.

These steps will help our businesses expand and create new jobs. But we also need to provide every American with the skills and training that they need to fill those jobs. Let’s start

Thank you, everybody. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:31 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Antonio Ross, principal, and Terea Brown, assistant principal, Hyde Park Academy High School; Nathaniel Pendleton and Cleopatra Crowley-Pendleton, parents of Hadiya Z. Pendleton, who was killed in Chicago, IL, on January 29; and Alvin Love, pastor, Lilydale First Baptist Church in Chicago, IL.

in the earliest years by offering high-quality preschool to every child in America, because we know kids in these programs do better throughout their lives. Let’s redesign our high schools so that our students graduate with the skills that employers are looking for right now. And because taxpayers can’t continue to subsidize the soaring cost of higher education, I’ve called on Congress to take affordability and value into account when determining which colleges receive certain types of Federal aid.

So those are steps we can take to help bring good jobs to America and equip our people with the skills those jobs require. And that brings us to the third question: How do we make sure hard work leads to a decent living?

No one in America should work full time and raise their children in poverty. So let’s raise the minimum wage so that it’s a wage you can live on. And it’s time to harness the talents and ingenuity of hard-working immigrants by finally passing comprehensive immigration reform: securing our borders, establishing a responsible path to earned citizenship, and attracting the highly skilled entrepreneurs and engineers that will help create jobs.

These steps will help grow our economy and rebuild a rising, thriving middle class. And we can do it while shrinking our deficits. We don’t have to choose between the two, we just have to make smarter choices.

Over the last few years, both parties have worked together to reduce the deficit by more than \$2.5 trillion, which puts us more than