

to advance the interests of the American people. I have not seen that on the other side yet.

And what that tells me is, is that they've still got their minds on winning another election. And if that's the case, then even as we're doing everything we can to govern and even as I'm going to continue to reach out to the other side, I'm going to do everything I can to make sure that we've got Nancy Pelosi back in the speakership, because that's where she belongs. And I know the American people will benefit from her leadership.

So, last thing I'll say, and then we'll open it up for questions: This will be hard. And frankly, the way gerrymandering now works and the geographical distribution of the population makes winning back the House a challenge. But you know what? Me winning the Presidency was a challenge. Nancy Pelosi becoming the first female Speaker, that was a challenge. It wasn't easy back in 2006. It wasn't easy back in 2008. So it's always challenging. Politics in America is tough, and it's competitive, and the country does have some very deep divisions on a whole range of issues. But it can be done.

Remarks on the Federal Student Loan Program May 31, 2013

Good morning, everybody. Have a seat, have a seat. Welcome to the White House. I know it's a little warm. *[Laughter]*

One of my favorite things about this job is that I get to spend some time with remarkable young people from all across the country. It inspires me. It makes me feel good. Those of you who have had to put on suits and ties and show up at the White House first thing on a Friday morning may not feel the same way I do—*[laughter]*—but I appreciate all of you being here. You cleaned up very well.

And these students and graduates are here to talk about something that matters to millions of young people and their families, and that's the cost of a college education. Because this isn't just critical for their futures, but it's also critical for America's futures.

Over the past 4½ years, we've been fighting our way back from a financial crisis and an in-

And the question is going to be, are not only the folks in this room, who are the choir, but are we able and willing to mobilize friends, neighbors, coworkers, business partners, and grab them by the collar—not literally, necessarily, but figuratively—and say to them, “The stakes are big here, and we've got to stop fooling around”?

If all of you feel the same passion and intensity around this midterm election as so many of you felt in 2007, 2008 when I was running for President or in 2004 when I was running for Senate, then we're going to get the House back. And when we do, we're going to be in a position to deliver for that next generation. And nothing else should matter. Nothing else is more important.

Thank you. All right.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:37 p.m. at the residence of Bettylu K. and Paul W. Saltzman. In his remarks, he referred to Joan W. Harris, chairwoman, Irving B. Harris Foundation; and Judith Gaynor, founding cochair, Human Rights Watch Chicago Committee.

credibly punishing recession—the worst since the Great Depression—and it cost millions of Americans their jobs and their homes, the sense of security that they'd spent their lives building up.

The good news is, today, our businesses have created nearly 7 million new jobs over the past 38 months. Five hundred thousand of those jobs are in manufacturing. We're producing more of our own energy, we're consuming less energy, and we're importing less from other countries. The housing market is coming back. The stock market has rebounded. Our deficits are shrinking at the fastest pace in 50 years. People's retirement savings are growing again. The rise of health care costs are slowing. The American auto industry is back.

So we're seeing progress, and the economy is starting to pick up steam. The gears are starting to turn again, and we're getting some trac-

tion. But the thing is, the way we measure our progress as a country is not just where the stock market is; it's not just to how well the folks at the top are doing; it's not just about the aggregate economic numbers; it's about how much progress ordinary families are making. Are we creating ladders of opportunity for everybody who's willing to work hard? Are we creating not only a growing economy, but also the engine that is critical to long-lasting, sustained economic growth, and that is a rising, thriving middle class. That's our focus. That's what we've got to be concerned about every single day. That's our north star.

And that means there are three questions we have to ask ourselves as a nation. Number one, how do we make America a magnet for good jobs in this competitive 21st-century economy? Number two, how do we make sure that our workers earn the skills and education they need to do those jobs? And number three, how do we make sure those jobs actually pay a decent wage or salary so that people can save for retirement, send their kids to college?

Those are the questions we've got to be asking ourselves every single day. So we're here today to talk about that second question: How do we make sure our workers earn the skills and education they need to do the jobs that companies are hiring for right now and are going to keep hiring for in the future? We know that the surest path to the middle class is some form of higher education: a 4-year degree, a community college degree, an advanced degree. You're going to need more than just a high school education to succeed in this economy.

And the young people here today, they get that. They're working through college—maybe just graduated—and earning their degree isn't just the best investment that they can make for their future, it's the best investment that they can make in America's future.

But like a lot of young people all across the country, these students have had to take on more and more and more debt to pay for this investment. Since most of today's college students were born, tuition and fees at public universities have more than doubled. And these

days, the average student who takes out loans to pay for 4 years of college graduates owing more than \$26,000. How many people are on track here for \$26,000?

And that doesn't just hold back our young graduates, it holds back our entire middle class because Americans now owe more on our student loans than we do on our credit cards. And those payments can last for years, even decades, which means that young people are putting off buying their first car or their first house—the things that grow our economy and create new jobs. And I've said this before, I know this first hand, Michelle and I, we did not finish paying off our student loans until about 9 years ago. And our student loans cost more than our mortgage. Right when we wanted to start saving for Sasha and Malia's college education, we were still paying off our own college education.

And we were lucky. We had more resources than many. So we cannot price the middle class—or folks who are willing to work hard to get into the middle class—out of a college education. We can't keep saddling young people with more and more and more debt, just as they're starting out in life.

Now, the good news is, over the past 4 years, my administration has done a lot to address this. Working with Members of Congress, we've expanded student aid. We've reformed the student loan system. We've saved tens of billions of taxpayer dollars that were just going to big banks and made sure that the money went to helping more young people afford college.

We made it easier to pay back those loans by passing a law that says you'll only have to pay 10 percent of your monthly income towards your student—Federal student loans once you graduate. This is important to emphasize, by the way, because a lot of your peers, a lot of young people don't know this. Under existing law that we passed, you never have to pay more than 10 percent of your income in paying back your Federal student loans, which means if you want to be a teacher, you want to go into a profession that does not pay a lot of money, but

gives you a lot of satisfaction, you are still capable of doing that and supporting yourself.

We unveiled a new college scorecard that gives parents and students the clear, concise information that you need to shop around for a school with the best value for you. And I've made it clear that those colleges that don't do enough to keep college costs down should get less taxpayer support.

So we're doing what we can, but here's the thing: If Congress doesn't act by July 1, Federal student loan rates are set to double. And that means that the average student with these loans will rack up an additional \$1,000 in debt. That's like a \$1,000 tax hike. I assume most of you cannot afford that. Anybody here can afford that? No.

Now, if this sounds like *déjà vu* all over again, that's because it is. We went through this last summer. Some of you were here. It wasn't as hot. *[Laughter]* I don't think we did this event outside. *[Laughter]* But we went through this. And eventually, Congress listened to all the parents and young people who said, don't double my rate. And because folks made their voices heard, Congress acted to keep interest rates low. But they only did it for a year, and that year is almost up.

So the test here is simple: We've got to make sure that Federal student loan rates don't double on July 1. Now, the House of Representatives has already passed a student loan bill, and I'm glad that they took action. But unfortunately, their bill does not meet that test. It fails to lock in low rates for students next year. That's not smart. It eliminates safeguards for lower income families. That's not fair. It could actually cost a freshman starting school this fall more over the next 4 years than if we did nothing at all and let the interest rates double on July 1.

So the House bill isn't smart, and it's not fair. I'm glad the House is paying attention to it, but they didn't do it in the right way. So I'm asking young people to get involved and make your voices heard once again. Last year, you convinced 186 Republicans in the House and 24 Republicans in the Senate to work with Democrats to keep student loan rates low. You

made something bipartisan happen in this town that is—that's a powerful thing. You guys were able to get Democrats and Republicans to vote for something that was important.

So this year, if it looks like your representatives have changed their minds, you're going to have to call them up again or e-mail them again or tweet them again and ask them what happened—what changed? You're still taking out these loans. You're still facing challenges.

Remind them that we're a people who help one another earn an education, because it benefits all of us. During the Civil War, Lincoln had the foresight to set up a system of land-grant colleges. At the end of World War II, we set up the GI bill so that people like my grandfather could come back from a war and get an education. All these things created the greatest middle class on Earth.

My mom, a single mom, was able to get the support that she needed through loans and grants—even while she was also working and raising two kids—to get her degrees. I'm only here, Michelle is only right over there on the East Wing, because we got great educations. We didn't come from privilege. And we want to make sure that the next generation has those same opportunities, because that has been good for the country as a whole.

It's up to us now to carry forward that tradition. Higher education cannot be a luxury for a privileged few. It is an economic necessity that every family should be able to afford, every young person with dreams and ambition should be able to access. And now is not the time for us to turn back on young people. Now is not the time to slash the investments that help us grow. Now is the time to reaffirm our commitment to you and the generation that's coming behind you, and that if we work together to generate more jobs and educate more kids and open up new opportunities for everybody who's willing to work and willing to push through those doors of opportunity, America can't be stopped. All right?

So I'm putting my faith in you. Let's work together. Let's get this done by July 1. Thank you everybody. God bless you. God bless America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:26 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to his sister Maya Soetoro-Ng. He also referred to H.R. 1911.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization *May 31, 2013*

President Obama. Well, it's a great pleasure once again to welcome our Secretary of NATO, Anders Rasmussen. He has been an extraordinary partner for us and, I believe, a great leader for NATO.

Over the last several years, he has helped to orchestrate a very successful Lisbon summit, a very successful Chicago summit. And in between, he has been able to mobilize and activate NATO members to take a whole host of actions that have resulted in a more secure world and has helped to underscore the importance of this alliance in the 21st century as a baseline whereby the United States and other member nations achieve security for their people. And so I'm very grateful for his extraordinary service.

We had an excellent discussion today focused on a number of issues that are of concern to all NATO members and are of great concern to the United States. Obviously, at the top of our list was Afghanistan, where the international coalition that has worked alongside our U.S. troops has achieved significant progress. And we are now looking over the next several weeks to a new milestone, one that was set in Chicago, where we are transitioning to Afghan lead for combat operations in Afghanistan and NATO members and ISAF members will be shifting into a train, assist, and advise mode.

We've seen great progress in the Afghan National Security Forces. We want to continue those—that progress. And central to that will be those NATO members, who are contributing, continuing to work effectively with their Afghan counterparts so that moving into next year, we have a successful Afghan election and we continue transition until the end of 2014 whereby our combat roles will be completed.

We had an opportunity to discuss not only the planning for the next year and a half, but

also what kinds of steps we could take post-2014 to continue to ensure that Afghan security forces are effective and can control their own borders and that NATO members can be assured that Afghanistan will not be used as a base for terrorism in the future.

And what we've agreed to is that in order for us facilitate this entire process, that it would be appropriate for us to have another NATO summit next year. And so Secretary Rasmussen will be working diligently, as he always does, to identify a host country and to plan for a 2014 NATO summit, at which time not only will we be able to underscore this final chapter in our Afghan operations, but also to paint a picture of the future whereby we're partnering with the Afghan Government on behalf of the Afghan people and on behalf of world security.

In addition to talking about Afghanistan, we also discussed the importance of continuing to improve NATO defense capabilities in a new world with new threats. And Anders has taken the lead talking with all the NATO members about how we start building up greater and greater capacity and integration. That requires burden-sharing on the part of all NATO members. It means that even during times of austerity, that we work smarter together to ensure that we can meet and are prepared for any threats that may arise, whether it is improving our joint surveillance capabilities or addressing new threats like cybersecurity.

And because of Anders's leadership, I think we've made real progress on this front. One of the goals of a 2014 NATO summit would be to lock in some of the progress that's already been made into a set of commitments that are clearly understood by all the NATO members, and I very much appreciate the work that Anders has done on that front.