

water cooler at work. And that grassroots work that is done also then energizes me and informs the issues that we're going to try to lift up over the course of the next year.

So I just want to say to all of you, what you're doing is really important, and we really appreciate it. And you don't always—it's not always flashy. It's often at the ground level, but it makes a difference.

And one final example of that difference that's being made is when it comes to the Affordable Care Act. Obviously, nowhere has there been more misinformation, nowhere are just basic facts more contested. But as a consequence of some of the folks that have been doing this work on the ground, as of today, we've signed up more than 4 million people through the exchanges. That's 4 million people who have the security of health care, in many cases for the very first time. And that doesn't count the 3 million who are already able to get health insurance because they're staying on their par-

ent's plan. That doesn't count the millions who have been able to sign up through Medicaid. And we're not done yet.

So when you've got grassroots folks who are committed and energized like they are, it makes a difference. And whatever issues you care about, whether it's climate change or women's reproductive health or foreign policy or education or access to higher education, having folks who are willing to fight for what they believe in connected to what we do here is really powerful and important. And they couldn't do it without you.

So I just wanted to say thank you to all of you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:19 p.m. at the Mandarin Oriental Washington, DC, hotel. In his remarks, he referred to James A. Messina, national chairman, and Jon Carson, executive director, Organizing for Action; and former U.S. Ambassador to Spain Alan D. Solomont.

Remarks in Saint Paul, Minnesota February 26, 2014

The President. Hello, Saint Paul! Oh, it is good to be back in Minnesota.

Audience member. We love you!

The President. I love you back. That's why I came here. It's great to see you.

Although, can I just say that when we got off the plane, Secretary Foxx, who is from North Carolina, turned to me, and he said, this is the coldest I've ever been in my life. [Laughter] Now, we were only out there for like a minute—[laughter]—which goes to show how soft these folks from North Carolina are when it comes to the weather. [Laughter] I, on the other hand, am from Chicago. I walked off those stairs, I was like, this is balmy, this is great. [Laughter] February in Minnesota, can't beat it. Cannot beat it.

Now, in addition to Secretary Foxx, who I want to—give him a big round of applause for that introduction. You've two champions for the people of Minnesota who are here today. You've got Representative Betty McCollum and Representative Keith Ellison. You've got

your mayor, Chris Coleman, in the house. The new mayor of Minneapolis, Betsy Hodges, is here. And my great friend, who actually told me I was running for President before I knew I was running for President, R.T. Rybak. Love that name. Where's R.T.? He's around here somewhere.

Now, I want to thank everybody who showed me around Union Depot and gave me a preview of this new light-rail line. It is fantastic. And I also just want to say—even though he's not here today—I want to say to everybody how Michelle and I have been keeping in our thoughts and prayers one of the great Americans that we know, as well as a great Minnesotan, Walter Mondale.

Now, like millions of Americans, I've spent some time with Minnesotans lately—because I was watching the Olympics. [Laughter] Minnesota sent 19 athletes to the games. Now, that's tied for second most of any State, and they did us all proud. It is not shocking that Minnesotans might be pretty good at the Win-

ter Olympics. [*Laughter*] What is particularly interesting is that, once again, the tiny town of Warroad proved that it really is Hockeytown, U.S.A., thanks to T.J. Oshie and Gigi Marvin, who we're just so proud of. And T.J.'s shootout performance against the Russians, I must say, I enjoyed a lot. I tweeted at him about it.

So we've spent some time over the last few weeks on hockey, but I'm not here to talk about hockey. By the way, I cannot play hockey. [*Laughter*] I grew up in Hawaii. We do not have hockey in Hawaii. But I'm here to talk about what you're doing in the Twin Cities and how you're helping to create new jobs and new opportunities for every American.

We are at a moment when our economy is growing. Our businesses have created about 8½ million new jobs in the past 4 years. Unemployment is at the lowest it's been in over 5 years; in Minnesota, it's lower than it's been in 6½ years. And by the way, you've got a great Governor who I served with in the Senate, Mark Dayton, who is helping to make that happen.

So in a lot of ways, things are looking up. But in some ways, the trends that had been battering middle class families for a long time have gotten even starker, because those at the top are doing better than ever, while wages and incomes for a lot of families have barely budged. And too many families are working harder than ever just to keep up. So as I said at the State of the Union Address a few weeks back, our job is to reverse those trends. We've got to build an economy that works for everybody. We've got to restore opportunity for all people so that no matter who you are, where you come from, what you look like, you can get ahead if you work hard and you're responsible.

And so I laid out an opportunity agenda that has four parts. Number one, good jobs that pay good wages in manufacturing, in energy, in innovation, and infrastructure. Number two, train folks with the skills they need to get those good jobs, something that your Senator, Al Franken, is doing great work on every single day. He cares a lot about that job training issue. Number three, guaranteeing every child has access to a world-class education. And

number four, making sure that hard work is rewarded with wages you can live on and savings you can retire on and health care you can count on. That's what we're fighting for.

Minnesota is helping to lead the way on these issues. Your State legislature is poised to raise your minimum wage this year. In my State of the Union Address, I called for a new women's economic agenda. It's actually a family economic agenda: equal pay for equal work, paid sick leave, and more. And there are leaders in your State legislature that are working hard at this because they know when women succeed, America succeeds.

So on all these issues, we're reaching out to Members of Congress, looking to see if they're willing to work with us on some of these priorities. But what I also said at the State of the Union is, in this year of action, whenever I can partner directly with States or cities or business leaders or civic leaders to act on this opportunity agenda, I'm going to go ahead and do it. We can't wait. We've got to move. We've got to get things going. Too many families are counting on it.

So yesterday I launched new hubs to attract 21st-century manufacturing jobs to America. And today I'm here to launch a new competition for 21st-century infrastructure and the jobs that come with it, because any opportunity agenda begins with creating more good jobs. And one of the fastest and best ways to create good jobs is by rebuilding America's infrastructure: our roads, our bridges, our rails, our ports, our airports, our schools, our power grids. We've got a lot of work to do out there, and we've got to put folks to work.

One of the most difficult things about the financial crisis we went through was the housing bubble bursting, and construction workers were hammered harder than just about anybody. And while we've cut the unemployment rate for construction workers almost in half since 2010, too many are still looking for jobs at a time when we've got so much that we could put them to work on rebuilding. We've got ports that aren't ready for the next generation of supertankers. We've got more than a

hundred thousand bridges that are old enough to qualify for Medicare. [Laughter]

Everybody knows—and nobody knows better than Minnesotans—when we've gone through a winter like this, roads are wrecked, full of potholes all across the country.

Now, other countries are not waiting to rebuild their infrastructure. They're trying to outbuild us today so they can outcompete us tomorrow. As a percentage of GDP, countries like China, Germany, they're spending about twice what we're spending in order to build infrastructure because they know that if they have the fastest trains on the planet or the highest rated airports or the busiest, most efficient ports, that businesses will go there.

But we don't want businesses to go there. We want them to come here to Minnesota. We want them to come here to the United States of America. And that means the best airports and the best roads and the best trains should be right here in America.

At a time when companies are saying they intend to hire more people this year, we need to make that decision easier for them. And we can create jobs at the same time, rebuilding our transportation systems, our power grids, our communications networks, all the things that commerce relies on and that help get workers to those jobs.

So the bottom line is, there's work to be done, workers ready to do it. Rebuilding our infrastructure is vital to business. It creates good-paying jobs that, by the way, cannot be outsourced. This is one of Congress's major responsibilities: helping States and cities fund new infrastructure projects.

And the reason—part of the reason I'm focused on this is, Congress has an important deadline coming up. If Congress doesn't finish a transportation bill by the end of the summer, we could see construction projects stop in their tracks, machines sitting idle, workers off the job.

So next week, I'm going to send Congress a budget that funds rebuilding our transportation infrastructure in a more responsible way, by doing it over 4 years, which gives cities and States and private investors the certainty they

need to plan major projects. Projects like repairing essential highways and bridges, building new transit systems in fast-growing cities and communities so folks who live there can get to work and school every day and spend less time sitting in traffic. And we're going to have to construct smarter, more resilient transportation systems that can withstand the worst impacts of climate change, like bigger surges of water that we've seen in recent floods.

So all told, my transportation budget will support millions of jobs nationwide. And we'll pay for these investments in part by simplifying the Tax Code. We're going to close wasteful tax loopholes, lower tax rates for businesses that create jobs here at home, stop rewarding companies for sending jobs to other countries, use the money we save for—in this transition to create good jobs with good wages rebuilding America. It makes sense. [Applause] It makes sense.

Now, I'll be honest with you, there are leaders in both parties who are willing to reach across the aisle in Congress when it comes to American infrastructure. They know how important it is. And infrastructure didn't use to be a partisan issue; it shouldn't be Democrat or Republican. Everybody uses roads, everybody uses ports, airports. Unfortunately, time and again over the past few years, there have been some Republicans in Congress who have refused to act on commonsense proposals that will create jobs and grow our economy. Partly, it's not that they're—I guess, they don't like roads, they just don't want to pay for them. It doesn't work that way. You've got to come up with a way to get these projects going.

So while Congress is deciding what it's going to do next, I'm just going to go ahead and do what I can to create more good jobs. And that's why I came here to Saint Paul. [Applause] That's why I came here to Saint Paul.

Because this project symbolizes what's possible. Union Depot was renovated and expanded with the help of what we call TIGER grants. These are competitive grants that we created as part of the Recovery Act, also known as the stimulus, which actually worked, despite what everybody claims. So the idea is, if a city or

State comes up with a plan to modernize transportation infrastructure that will have a significant impact on economic activity and if they line up other sources of funding to help pay for it, they can win a TIGER grant and the Federal Government becomes a partner with these local communities.

So far, these grants have given a boost to 270 infrastructure projects across all 50 States. And you heard Secretary Foxx talk about—these grants are helping cities like L.A. and States like North Carolina, and they helped you rebuild this depot into a hub that will bring different modes of transportation together under one roof instead of scattered across the city. Amtrak is going to be here. The new Metro Green Line will be here. Bus lines will be here.

And I just had a chance to take a look at some of those spiffy new trains. [Laughter] They are nice. They—and they're energy efficient. They're going to be reliable. You can get from one downtown to the other in a little over 30 minutes instead of when it's snowing being in traffic for 2 hours. The trains were made in California, which meant folks were put to work here in the United States building them.

And here's the best part of it: Not only have you made a more efficient transportation system, cutting down commutes, saving on gas, reducing carbon pollution, but this depot has also helped to boost economic development in Lowertown Saint Paul. Just across the street, the old downtown post office building is becoming apartments and shops. All told, more than 4,000 jobs were created for this project. And we're seeing businesses crop up and new development crop up all along the line.

So everybody is winning. And in part because of some flexibility that we showed during the planning process, the line is also going to stop in some poor neighborhoods that oftentimes have difficulty getting to the places where there are jobs. So it's going to help folks who are willing to work hard, try getting to the middle class, it helps them get access—helps people get access to opportunity that, up until this point, had a tough time.

So we know this works. Today we're kicking off the next round of competition for TIGER

grants. Mayors and Governors, city councils, State legislatures, all of you who are watching here today: If you've got a great idea for your city or your State, then let us know your plan. If it will encourage economic activity and support local businesses and help put people to work, then your country is interested in partnering with you.

And TIGER grants aren't the only way that we can help cities like Saint Paul and Minneapolis rebuild their infrastructure. You've got—Federal funding helped to build the Green Line; that's going to make it easier than ever to travel between the two cities. You've got more than 5,000 construction workers from all over Minnesota helping to build it. Nearly 200 police officers, train operators, maintenance workers are being hired. And that's not counting all the jobs that are being created from the offices and the apartment buildings that are going to be built along the line. Because the trains stopped at neighborhoods that have access to public transportation, those folks are going to work. And all of this can be duplicated all across the country.

But unfortunately, funding for these projects are going to be in jeopardy unless Congress passes this new transportation bill. So I want everybody to understand. Now, the good news is, Keith Ellison, Betty, they're already on board. They know this needs to happen. Al Franken, all over it. Some Democrats and Republicans are already working together to make sure transportation doesn't—funding doesn't run out. And we're seeing some glimmers of hope, because this new round of TIGER grants was the result of bipartisan cooperation. That's what needs to happen when we work together.

But we're going to need your voices telling a story around the country about why this is so important. Roads and bridges should not be a partisan issue. More Americans should have access to the kind of efficient, affordable transit you're going to have with the Green Line. There's no faster way or better way for Congress to create jobs right now and to grow our economy right now and have a positive impact on our economy for decades than if we start

more projects and finish more projects like this one.

Let's create more good jobs, build smarter schools, better airports, faster railways, better broadband networks. Let's educate our kids and our workers better. Let's rebuild an economy where everybody who is willing to work hard has a chance to get ahead.

This is the beginning, not the end. We've got a lot more rail we've got to lay. We've got a lot more roads we've got to travel. Let's get going, Minnesota.

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:40 p.m. at Union Depot. In his remarks, he referred to former Mayor R.T. Rybak, Jr., of Minneapolis, MN; former Vice President Walter F. Mondale; Leif "T.J." Oshie, forward, National Hockey League's St. Louis Blues, in his capacity as member of the 2014 U.S. men's hockey team; and Gisèle "Gigi" Marvin, defenseman, 2014 U.S. women's hockey team.

Remarks on the My Brother's Keeper Initiative February 27, 2014

The President. Thank you. Everybody, please have a seat. Well, good afternoon, everybody.

Audience members. Good afternoon.

The President. Welcome to the White House. And thank you, Christian, for that outstanding introduction. And thank you for cheering for the White Sox, which is the right thing to do. [Laughter] Like your parents and your teachers, I could not be prouder of you. I could not be prouder of the other young men who are here today. But just so we're clear, you're only excused for 1 day of school. [Laughter] And I'm assuming you've got your assignments with you so that you can catch up, perhaps even on the flight back. [Laughter]

As Christian mentioned, I first met Christian about a year ago. I visited the Hyde Park Academy in Chicago, which is only about a mile from my house. And Christian was part of this program called Becoming a Man. It was a program that Mayor Rahm Emanuel introduced to me. And it helps young men who show a lot of potential, but may have gotten in some trouble to stay on the right path.

They get help with schoolwork, but they also learn life skills like how to be a responsible citizen and how to deal with life's challenges and how to manage frustrations in a constructive way and how to set goals for themselves. And it works. One study found that, among young men who participate in the B.A.M. program, arrests for violent crimes dropped 44 percent,

and they were more likely to graduate from high school.

So as Christian mentioned, during my visit, they're in a circle, and I sat down in the circle, and we went around, led by their counselor, and guys talked about their lives, talked about their stories. They talked about what they were struggling with and how they were trying to do the right thing and how sometimes they didn't always do the right thing. And when it was my turn, I explained to them that when I was their age, I was a lot like them. I didn't have a dad in the house. And I was angry about it, even though I didn't necessarily realize it at the time. I made bad choices. I got high without always thinking about the harm that it could do. I didn't always take school as seriously as I should have. I made excuses. Sometimes, I sold myself short.

And I remember when I was saying this—Christian, you may remember this—after I was finished, the guy sitting next to me said, "Are you talking about you?" [Laughter] I said, "Yes."

And the point was, I could see myself in these young men. And the only difference is that I grew up in an environment that was a little bit more forgiving, so when I made a mistake, the consequences were not as severe. I had people who encouraged me—not just my mom and grandparents, but wonderful teachers and community leaders—and they'd push me to work hard and study hard and make the