

Remarks at Valencia College, West Campus, in Orlando, Florida March 20, 2014

The President. Hello, Valencia! Well, thank you so much. It is great to be back in Orlando. I'm glad some of you came to work while a lot of folks are pretending to work and watching—[laughter]—the tournament. I know there must be some Gators fans around here. They are an outstanding team. I put out my men's bracket. I've got them going to the Final Four.

Audience member. They're going to win!

The President. And they could win the whole thing, in which case, I won't win the billion dollars. [Laughter] You can only pick one winner. There are 63 colleges mad at me. [Laughter] But—so I understand there are some neighbors up the road in Gainesville who are not happy with me. [Laughter] There will be even more tomorrow when I release my women's bracket, because you can't please anybody.

But we've got some terrific elected officials here. I just want to, in particular, thank the mayor of Orlando, Buddy Dyer, who's been a great friend. And give him a big round of applause. And I want to thank the president of Valencia College, Sandy—[applause]—where's Sandy? Sandy Shugart, there he is. We've got the president of the West Campus, who I just had an amazing conversation with, Falecia Williams. Where's Falecia? Right there. I want to thank everybody here at Valencia for having me.

A few years ago, I announced a new competition called the Aspen Prize to recognize exceptional community colleges, and lo and behold—[laughter]—your school, Valencia, was the very first school in the entire country to win this prize, and which—[applause]. So between the students' hard work, the outstanding faculty, the administrators who are making sure everybody has what they need to succeed, Valencia graduates are leaving here ready for a career, ready to continue their education, ready to pursue their dreams, wherever they may lead.

And so this college represents what's best in America: the idea that here in this country, if you work hard, you can get ahead. And restor-

ing that opportunity for every American, that's been our driving focus as a country. That's driven everything I've done since I came into office.

And today, we're at a moment when, after the first—after the worst economic crisis of our lifetimes, after just some devastating losses that people had—and their homes or their retirement accounts or their jobs—now we've seen businesses creating 8.7 million new jobs over the past 4 years. American manufacturers are adding jobs for the first time since the 1990s. In American energy, we're producing more oil here at home than we buy from other countries for the first time in two decades. We're generating more renewable energy. The housing market is rebounding, including here in Florida. Our high school graduation rate is the highest on record. [Applause] Absolutely. More young people are earning college degrees than ever before.

So even as we are digging ourselves out of the economic hole that we were in back in 2008, we've also worked to lay a new foundation for America's future growth. Now, here's the problem though. There are a bunch of good things happening, the economy is starting to grow, but some of the trends that have really battered middle class families and people who are working hard to get into the middle class for decades, those have not yet gotten better. Folks at the top are doing better than ever, but over the past 4 years, average wages have barely budged. So you've got too many Americans who are working harder than ever just to keep up.

And it's our job to reverse those trends. We've got to build an economy that works for everybody, not just for a few. We've got to restore opportunity for all people, the basic idea that no matter where you started, no matter what you look like, if you work hard, you can get ahead. America has got to be a place where, if you're responsible and you apply yourself, you can make it.

So what we've focused on is an opportunity agenda that has four parts. Part one is more

good jobs that pay good wages, whether it's in manufacturing, in energy, in innovation and technology, in the service industries. And one of the things we've done in Orlando is focus on growing tourism. And Buddy knows this. Two years ago, I came here to announce an Executive order to track more foreign tourists to the United States, and last year spending by foreign tourists was up almost 10 percent. That is a huge boost to Florida. We've got to keep on taking those kinds of steps.

Part two of our opportunity agenda: We've got to train more Americans with the skills that they need to fill the jobs that are actually out there, not just today, but also tomorrow.

Part three you know something about: We've got to make sure every young person has access to a world-class education, from high-quality preschool for every 4-year-old to an affordable college education for all you striving young people.

And part four is making sure that our economy rewards the hard work of every American with wages that you can live on, savings you can retire on, health care that's there when you need it.

And in pursuit of this opportunity agenda, I'm going to work with Congress wherever I can. But Congress doesn't always—[laughter]—move the way we'd like, and so we're calling this a year of action. Wherever I see a chance to go ahead and expand opportunity for more Americans, I'm going to take it. I'm not going to wait for Congress. We've just got to go ahead and get it done.

I'll give you a couple of examples. In the past few weeks, I've used my executive authority to require Federal contractors to pay their employees a fair wage of at least \$10.10 an hour to make sure that folks, if they're working full time, aren't living in poverty. I've signed another Executive order to make sure that they're actually paid the overtime that they've earned, because everybody who works hard deserves that chance to get ahead. And if you work more, you should get paid a little more.

As part of making sure our economy rewards the hard work of every American, I'm also coming here today to make sure that our econ-

omy rewards the hard work of women. Now, I just want to be clear, I've got nothing against you men. [Laughter] We're working hard to make sure that you're doing the right thing too and that you're getting opportunity as well. But I've got a personal stake in seeing women get ahead.

First of all, women make up 80 percent of my household—[laughter]—if you count my mother-in-law. And I always count my mother-in-law. [Laughter] But I also personally know the challenges that women face in our economy, and there are some particular challenges that women face. I grew up the son of a single mom who struggled to put herself through school and make ends meet and raise my sister and me the right way. And she couldn't have done it if it weren't for my grandparents. And the most important breadwinner in my family was my grandmother, who worked her way up from being a secretary to being a vice president of a bank—never got a college degree—but then hit a glass ceiling at that local bank where she worked. So she'd train men to eventually be her boss, even though she knew a lot more than they did.

When Michelle and I had our girls, we gave everything we had to try to balance raising a family and chasing careers. But I'll be honest with you, it was harder for her than it was for me. Because when she was with the girls, she'd feel guilty about, am I doing everything I need to be doing on the job. When she was at work, she'd feel bad about, are the girls missing me, and I know Barack is messing up somehow. [Laughter] So she's calling to check.

And so today, obviously, we're lucky, and Michelle and I usually get to have dinner with the girls every night, and they're doing great. And the highlight of every day for me is sitting with them at the dinner table. And I want to make sure my daughters are getting the same chances as men. I don't want them paid less for doing the same job as some guy is doing. When they have children, I want to make sure that they're not having to quit their jobs or in some other fashion be hampered because we don't have the kinds of policies in this country that support them.

My point is—and I’m saying now to the men—we’ve all got a stake in this. Women make up about half of our workforce. Over half of Valencia’s students, 56 percent, are women. In fact, for more than two decades, women have earned over half of the higher education degrees awarded in this country. So that means soon, for the first time, America’s highly educated workforce will be made up of more women than men.

But the thing is, our economy hasn’t caught up to that reality yet. So we’ve got too many women who work hard to support themselves and their families, including the 20 percent of women enrolled in college who are trying to raise kids while earning a degree, and they’re facing unfair choices or outdated workplace policies that are holding them back. That has to change, because it holds all of us back.

When women make less than men, that hurts their families, including their partners, their husbands, their kids. They’ve got less to get by on. It hurts businesses because now they—their customers have less to spend. When a job doesn’t offer adequate family leave to care for a new baby or an ailing parent, that burdens men and children. When any of our citizens can’t fulfill their potential for any reason that doesn’t have to do with their talent or their character or their work ethic, well, that’s holding us back. We do better when everybody participates, when everybody’s talents are put to use, everybody has a fair shot.

And I had a wonderful conversation before I came out here with Carolyn, and we had a group of other women, including Dr. Williams, and you should just have heard these stories. I mean, I don’t know if Dr. Williams has shared her story, but her mom was blind and raised her, a single mom. And she had to go to school and get a job, and when her child was born prematurely, her blind mother comes down to provide childcare because that’s the only way you could manage it.

You had another young woman describing what it’s like when you’ve got two—you’ve got twins, preemie babies, and she’s having to quit her job because there’s no childcare available, and how she needed WIC and other programs

to support her even though she had a loving husband who was helping out.

So this is a family agenda. But it starts with making sure every woman is getting a fair shot. It’s time for a woman’s economic agenda that grows our economy for everybody. Now, that begins with making sure women receive equal pay for equal work. This is a really simple principle. This should not be confusing. [Laughter] It’s not that complicated.

Today, more women are their family’s main breadwinner than ever before. But on average, women are still earning just 77 cents on every dollar that a man does. Women with college degrees may earn hundreds of thousands of dollars less over the course of her career than a man at the same educational level. And that’s wrong. This isn’t 1958, it’s 2014. That’s why the first bill I signed into law was called the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, and it made sure that it was easier for women to sue if they weren’t being paid the same as men.

And in the coming weeks, Congress will have a chance to go even further by voting yes or no on what’s called the Paycheck Fairness Act. Right now a majority of the Senators support that bill, but so far, Republicans have blocked it. We’ve got to get them to change their minds and join us in this century—[laughter]—because a woman deserves equal pay for equal work. It’s pretty straightforward.

And Congress should not stop there. A woman deserves workplace policies that protect her right to have a baby without losing her job. It’s pretty clear that if men were having babies—[laughter]—we’d have different policies. Right? I mean, we know that; that’s for certain. A woman deserves to take a day off to care for a sick child or a parent without running into hardship.

So Congress needs to act so that Americans join every other advanced nation on Earth by offering paid leave to folks who work hard every day. It’s time to do away with some of these workplace policies that belong in a “Mad Men” episode. [Laughter] We’ve got to make sure that every woman has the opportunities that she deserves, because when women succeed, America succeeds. I truly believe that.

And on the ride over here, we were talking about some of the best practices of companies that are highly successful. It turns out that if you give families—you give your workers some flexibility so that if they've got a sick child or a sick parent, they can have a little time off, that those employees are more productive, the companies do better, you have less turnover. So it's good business practice. It's the right thing to do.

At a time when women hold the majority of low-wage jobs, Congress is going to get a chance to vote yes or no on whether millions of women who work hard all day deserve a raise. There's a bill before Congress that would raise the Federal minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour. That would lift wages for nearly 28 million Americans across the country. And again, it would be good for business. Because what happens is more customers have more money to spend. It will grow the economy for everybody. It's time for Congress to join the rest of the country. It's time for—we're calling it the 10-10 campaign. Give America a raise. And that, in particular, will help the disproportionate number of women who are in lower wage jobs.

And on each of these issues, Members of Congress will have to choose between helping women and families get ahead or holding them back. Part of our challenge is fewer than 20 [percent of]^o seats in Congress are held by women. I think we're all clear that Congress would get more done if you kind of evened that out a little bit. I'm pretty confident about that.

But in the meantime, we're going to keep making the case as to why these policies are the right ones for working families and for businesses. So over the next few months, my administration is going to host a series of roundtable discussions like the one I had in different parts of the country just to hear stories about issues like workplace flexibility and opening up new leadership opportunities for women. And it's all going to lead up to the first-ever White House Summit on Working Families that we're going to be holding this

summer. And maybe some of you will participate, because we want to hear your stories.

Now, let me close by mentioning one last policy that's benefiting millions of women right now, and that is the Affordable Care Act. I know there's a lot of politics around it. I know there are a lot of TV ads around that don't always accurately reflect what's going on. But right now, despite the fact that the website was really bad for the first month—[laughter]—it's now fixed—more than 5 million Americans have signed up for plans at healthcare.gov. More than 5 million. More than 3 million young people have gained coverage because this law lets you stay on your parent's plan until you turn 26. So I'll bet there are some young people right now who have health insurance in this auditorium because of the law.

And thanks to this law, no American—zero—can ever again be denied health insurance because of a preexisting condition. Not to mention, no woman can ever again be charged more for just being a woman.

Now, this is something that people don't realize. Before we passed Obamacare, it was routine for insurance companies to charge women significantly more than men for health insurance. It's just like the drycleaners. [Laughter] You send in a blouse, I send in a shirt, they charge you twice as much. [Laughter] But the same thing was happening in health insurance. And so we've banned that policy for everybody, not just folks who were getting health insurance on the exchange. But if you were getting health insurance on the job, they can't discriminate against women in that same fashion. Not to mention tens of millions of women have gained access to free preventive care like mammograms and contraceptive care. The point is, no woman should have to put off the potentially lifesaving care she needs just because money is tight.

And in the roundtable I just had, there were at least three, four folks in that roundtable—the majority of the women I just talked to—had an instance in their lives where either because of a sick child or a premature baby or an ailing

^o White House correction.

parent, they would be bankrupt had they not had health insurance. Broke. So when you hear folks talking about Obamacare and I'm not using it because I've got health insurance or I'm healthy, well, yes, you don't need health insurance until you need health insurance. [Laughter] It seems like a drag until you actually confront what life does to all of us at some point. Some unexpected thing happens, and you want to make sure that you've got that support.

Now, none of that has stopped Republicans from Congress from spending the last few years not focused on legislation to create jobs or raise wages or help more young people afford college. They've taken 50 votes to try to repeal or undermine this law—50. You know what they say, the 50th time is the charm. [Laughter] Fifty times. And it's not just to try to improve the law or here's a particular problem. No, we just want to scrap it so that millions of people who now have health insurance, we want them to go back to not having health insurance.

Well, that's not going to happen. They can keep wasting their time repealing—trying to repeal the ACA; we're going to keep working to make this law work better because every person and every woman deserves to control her own health care choices, not her boss, not her insurer, surely not Congress.

So there's an important deadline coming up, by the way. This is now the last call for 2014. If you've been thinking about buying one of the new plans on healthcare.gov—and a large proportion of people, the majority, in fact, may be able to buy health insurance for as little as a hundred bucks or less a month, less than your cable or your cell phone bill. I saw everybody had a cell phone. [Laughter] But the deadline to get covered this year is March 31, which is just 11 days away. So if you are uninsured, check out your new choices at healthcare.gov. Many of you will be able to get covered for a hundred dollars a month or less. If you're already covered, then help get a friend covered, because that's part of what America is about: taking responsibility for working to achieve our own dreams; also coming together to help our fellow citizens pursue and secure their own dreams as well.

There are just such amazing stories of the women that I talked with before I came out here. Every one of them, at some point, had made a major sacrifice on behalf of their families. One woman had a severely autistic son, took 12 years off to raise her three kids, including this son, before now going back to school and being able to teach once again. Just like my mom. Just like my grandma. I didn't fully appreciate at the time the sacrifice they were making. I was talking about how I used to complain to my mom when she was going to school and working, why are we eating the same thing every night? [Laughter] Because she was doing so much and then coming home and still taking the time to make sure that I had a decent meal.

That's what built this country, those kinds of sacrifices. And we've got to make sure that we as a country are helping people who are so courageous and so brave and working so hard, all those moms and grandmas and young women like Carolyn who are trying to start their own businesses.

We've come a long way together over these past 5 years, but we've got to do more to restore opportunity for everybody. Whether you're a man or a woman, whether you are Black, White, Latino, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, with or without a disability, all of us have something to offer. All of us have a place in this American story. And as long as I have the privilege of being President, I'm going to keep working to make sure every single one of us have a chance to succeed. Or as you say here at Valencia, "We Say You Can."

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 3 p.m. in Room 8–11 A–D of the Special Events Center. In his remarks, he referred to his mother-in-law Marian Robinson and sister Maya Soetoro-Ng; Carolyn Verno, student, Valencia College, who introduced the President; Lynn Desjarlais, career program adviser, Valencia College; and Orlando, FL, resident Eve Gassman. He also referred to the memorandum of March 13 on updating and modernizing overtime regulations, which is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.