

in a canal, face down, underwater, shrapnel in his brain. For months, he lay in a coma. And the next time I met him, in the hospital, he couldn't speak, could barely move. Over the years, he's endured dozens of surgeries and procedures, hours of grueling rehab every day.

Even now, Cory is still blind in one eye, still struggles on his left side. But slowly, steadily, with the support of caregivers like his dad Craig and the community around him, Cory has grown stronger. And day by day, he's learned to speak again and stand again and walk again. And he's working toward the day when he can serve his country again. "My recovery has not been easy," he says. "Nothing in life that's worth anything is easy."

Cory is here tonight. And like the Army he loves, like the America he serves, Sergeant First Class Cory Rensburg never gives up, and he does not quit. Cory.

My fellow Americans, men and women like Cory remind us that America has never come easy. Our freedom, our democracy, has never been easy. Sometimes, we stumble, we make mistakes; we get frustrated or discouraged. But for more than 200 years, we have put those things aside and placed our collective shoulder to the wheel of progress: to create and build and expand the possibilities of individual achievement, to free other nations from tyranny and fear, to promote justice and fairness and equality under the law so that the words

set to paper by our Founders are made real for every citizen. The America we want for our kids—a rising America where honest work is plentiful and communities are strong, where prosperity is widely shared and opportunity for all lets us go as far as our dreams and toil will take us—none of it is easy. But if we work together—if we summon what is best in us, the way Cory summoned what is best in him—with our feet planted firmly in today, but our eyes cast toward tomorrow, I know it is within our reach. Believe it.

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:15 p.m. in the House Chamber of the U.S. Capitol. In his remarks, he referred to Jill T. Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden; Mary T. Barra, chief executive officer, General Motors Co.; Andra M. Rush, president and chief executive officer, Detroit Manufacturing Systems; Oak Park, IL, resident Misty DeMars and her husband, Leighton Taylor; Estiven Rodriguez, student, Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School in New York City; Gilbert, AZ, resident Amanda Shelley; former White House Counsel Robert F. Bauer and Benjamin L. Ginsberg, partner, Patton Boggs LLP, in their capacity as Cochairs of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration; and 2012 Republican Presidential nominee W. Mitt Romney.

Remarks at the Costco Wholesale Corporation's Woodmore Towne Centre Warehouse in Glenarden, Maryland

January 29, 2014

Hello, Maryland! Well, it's good to see you. I love getting outside the Beltway, even if it is just a few hundred feet away. [Laughter]

Well, first of all, give Teresa a great big round of applause for the great job she did. I don't know where she—[applause]. The—it is good to be here with all of you. I want to acknowledge a champion for working families right here in Maryland, Governor Martin O'Malley. Some folks who go to bat for working people every single day: Senator Ben Car-

din is here; Congresswoman Donna Edwards is here. And all of you are here.

Teresa's story proves that treating workers well is not just the right thing to do, it is an investment. And Teresa's 27 years of hard work at Costco proves that investment pays off. I talked a little bit about this last night in my State of the Union Address. Now, I only finished 12 hours ago, so these remarks will be quicker. [Laughter] And I need some time to pick up a snow shovel and one of those 50-

pound bags of dog food for Bo and Sunny. I was told I could get a big-screen TV too for the Super Bowl coming up.

Audience member. What size can I get for you, sir?

The President. The 80-inch. [*Laughter*]

Audience member. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Say 60 is not enough, huh? Got to go 80. [*Laughter*]

It is funny, though, I was looking—you can buy a sofa, a—chocolate chip cookies, and a snorkel set all in the same—[*laughter*]. The sofa didn't surprise me, but the snorkel set—[*laughter*—now, that was impressive. Although, I do want to ask, who's snorkeling right now? [*Laughter*] How many of those are you guys selling? You never know. [*Laughter*]

But what I talked about last night was a simple but profound idea, and it's an idea that's at the heart of who we are as Americans: opportunity for everybody, giving everybody a fair chance. If they're willing to work hard, take responsibility, give them a shot. The idea that no matter who you are, where you come from, what you look like, what your last name is, if you work hard, you live up to your responsibilities, you can succeed, you can support a family. That's what America should be about. Nobody is looking for a free lunch, but give people a chance. And if they're working hard, make sure they can support a family.

Now, we're at a moment where businesses all across the country, businesses like Costco, have created 8 million new jobs over the last 4 years. Our unemployment rate is the lowest it's been in more than 5 years. Our deficits have been cut in half. Housing is rebounding. Manufacturing is adding jobs for the first time since the nineties. We sell more of what we make here in America to other places than ever before. Business leaders are deciding that China's not the best place to invest and create jobs, America is.

So we—this could be a breakthrough year for America. After 5 years of hard work, overcoming the worst recession in our lifetimes, we're better positioned for this young century than anybody else. But the question for folks in Washington is whether they're going to help

that progress or hinder that progress; whether they're going to waste time creating new crises for people and new uncertainty—like the shut-down—or are we going to spend time creating new jobs and new opportunities.

And I know what I'm choosing to do, because it's what you do: I'm choosing this to be a year of action. Because too many Americans are working harder than ever just to get by, much less get ahead. The scars of the recession are real. The middle class has been taking it on the chin since before the recession. The economy has been growing for 4 years now. Corporate profits, stock prices have all soared. But the wages and incomes of ordinary people haven't gone up in over a decade.

So that's why last night, I laid out some steps that we can take—concrete, commonsense proposals—to speed up economic growth, strengthen the middle class, build new ladders of opportunity into the middle class.

And this opportunity agenda has four parts. Number one, we need more new jobs. Number two, we need to train more Americans with the job—with the skills that they need to fill those jobs. Number three, we should guarantee every child access to a world-class education. And number four, let's make sure hard work pays off.

Now, some of my ideas, I'll need Congress. But America can't just stand still if Congress isn't doing anything. I'm not going to stand still either. Wherever I can take steps to expand opportunity for more families, I'm going to do it, with or without Congress. Because the defining project of our time, of our generation, is to restore opportunity for everybody. And so I'm here at Costco today to talk about the fourth part of the opportunity agenda, and that is, making hard work pay off for every single American.

Five years ago I signed my first bill into law. I didn't have any gray hair. [*Laughter*] And—you think it's distinguished? Okay. [*Laughter*] That's the guy with the gray beard saying—[*laughter*]. So this first bill that I signed was called the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. Lilly was at my speech last night. And it's a law to help protect a woman's right to fair pay. But at

a time when women make about—make up about half of the workforce, but still make 77 cents for every dollar a man earns, we've got to finish the job and give women the tools they need to fight for equal pay. Women deserve equal pay for equal work. They deserve—if they're having a baby, they shouldn't have to sacrifice their job. A mom deserves a day off to care for a sick child or a sick parent, and a father does too.

As I said last night, we've got to get rid of these—some of these workplace policies that belong in a "Mad Men" episode, belong back in the fifties. We've got to give every woman the opportunity she deserves. Because when women succeed, America succeeds.

Now, women happen to hold a majority of lower wage jobs in America. But they're not the only ones who are stifled when wages aren't going up. As Americans, we understand some people are going to earn more than other people, and we don't resent those who because they work hard, because they come up with a new idea, they achieve incredible success. We want our kids to be successful.

And it's funny, Michelle and I sometimes talk—Michelle's dad was a blue-collar worker; her mom was a secretary. I was raised by a single mom. We didn't go around when we were growing up being jealous about folks who had made a lot of money, as long as—if we were working hard, we could have enough. So Americans overwhelmingly agree, nobody who works full-time should ever have to raise a family in poverty. And that is why I firmly believe it's time to give America a raise.

A hundred years ago, Henry Ford started Ford Motor Company. Model T, you remember all that? Henry Ford realized he could sell more cars if his workers made enough money to buy the cars. He had started this—factories and mass production and all that, but then he realized, if my workers aren't getting paid, they won't be able to buy the cars, and then I can't make a profit and reinvest to hire more workers. But if I pay my workers a good wage, they can buy my product, I make more cars. Ultimately, I'll make more money, they've got

more money in their pockets, so it's a win-win for everybody.

And leaders today—business leaders today, some of them understand this same concept. Now, Costco's CEO, Craig Jelinek, he understands this. He feels the same way. He knows that Costco is going to do better—all our businesses do better—when customers have more money to spend. And listen, Craig is a wonderful guy, but he's not in this for philanthropy. He's a businessman. He's looking at the bottom line. But he sees that if he's doing right by Costco's workers, then they can buy that 80-inch TV too. [*Laughter*] Right?

Profitable corporations like Costco see higher wages as a smart way to boost productivity and to reduce turnover. So entry-level employees here—stock associates, cashiers—start at \$11.50 an hour. Start at \$11.50 an hour.

Audience member. Mr. President, we love you!

The President. Thank you.

The average hourly wage is more than \$20, not including overtime or benefits. And Costco's commitment to fairness doesn't stop at the checkout counter, it extends down the supply chain, including to many of the farm workers who grow the product—the produce that you sell.

Now, what this means is that Costco has some of the lowest employee turnover in your industry. So you're not constantly retraining folks because they quit. You got people like Teresa who's been here 27 years because it's a company that's looking out for workers. And I've got to tell you, when I walk around, just—I had a little tour of the produce section, the bakery—you could just tell people feel good about their job and they feel good about the company and you have a good atmosphere and the managers and people all take pride in what you do.

Now, folks who work at Costco understand that, but there are a lot of Americans who don't work somewhere like Costco, and they're working for wages that don't go as far as they once did. Today, the minimum wage—the Federal minimum wage doesn't even go as far as it did back in the 1950s. And as the cost of

living goes up, the value of the minimum wage goes down over time. Just last year alone, workers earning the minimum wage basically got the equivalent of a \$200 pay cut because the minimum wage stayed the same, but costs of everything else are going up.

I don't need to tell you this. You go shopping. [Laughter] So you're like, mm-hmm. [Laughter] Mm-hmm. [Laughter] For a typical minimum-wage worker, that's a month's worth of groceries. It's 2 months of electricity. It's a big deal to a lot of families.

So I brought a guy here today who knows a little bit about this: Tom Perez is America's Secretary of Labor—[applause]—works for working families every day. I stole him from Governor O'Malley. [Laughter] He's—he came here from Maryland. But when he was Governor O'Malley's labor secretary here in Maryland, he helped implement the country's first statewide living wage law. And that helped a lot of Maryland families. But there are more families in Maryland and across the country who put in long days, they've got hard jobs; they deserve higher wages.

And in the year since I first asked Congress to raise the Federal minimum wage, five States have passed laws to raise theirs. Governor O'Malley is trying to do it here in Maryland and lift the minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour. He says, "We all do better when we're all doing better." He's right. Prince George's County, Montgomery County are banding together with DC to raise the regional minimum wage. And I'm here to support your efforts. [Applause] I'm here to support your efforts. And as I said last night, to every Governor, mayor, State legislator out there, if you want to take the initiative to raise your minimum wage laws to help more hard-working Americans make ends meet, then I'm going to be right there at your side.

While Congress decides whether it's going to raise the minimum wage or not, people outside Washington are not waiting for Congress. And I'm not either. So as a chief executive, I'm going to lead by example. In the coming weeks, I will issue an Executive order requiring Federal contractors to pay their federally funded

employees on new contracts a fair wage of at least \$10.10 an hour. Because if you cook our troops' meals, wash their dishes, you shouldn't have to live in poverty.

So there's some steps businesses are taking on their own. There are steps that certain States and counties and cities are taking on their own. There are steps I'm going to take as President. But ultimately, Congress does have to do its part to catch up to the rest of the country on this.

And there's a reason why a wide majority of Americans support increasing the minimum wage. Look, most Americans who are working make more than the minimum wage. So it's interesting that the overwhelming number of Americans support raising the minimum wage. It's not that it's going to necessarily affect them personally right now, it's that they know, they understand, the value behind the minimum wage. If you work hard, you should be able to pay your rent, buy your groceries, look after your kids. If you put in a hard day's work, you deserve decent pay for it. That's a principle everybody understands, everybody believes.

So right now in Congress, there's a bill that would lift the Federal minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour. Ten-ten. Ten-ten, it's easy. [Laughter] It will give more businesses more customers with more money to spend. I guarantee you, if workers have a little more money in their pocket, they'll spend more at Costco. And if Costco is seeing more customers, they'll hire some more folk. Everybody does better.

And the thing about it is, raising the minimum wage doesn't require new spending by the Federal Government. It doesn't require a big bureaucratic program. It would help a lot of Americans make ends meet.

So I need everybody here and everybody who's going to be watching, tell Congress to make this happen. Give America a raise. Making work pay means doing more to help Americans all across this country, but it also means improving the economy. Because one of the things that's been holding our economy back is wages and incomes being flat, which means consumers aren't spending as much, which means businesses don't have as many

customers, which means they don't hire as much and they don't invest as much, and we don't get that lift-off on the economy that we could.

If we want to make work pay, we also have to help Americans save for retirement, and I'm going to be flying up to Pittsburgh this afternoon to talk about that. Making work pay means access to health care that's there when you get sick. And the Affordable Care Act means nobody can ever be dropped or denied coverage for a preexisting condition like asthma or cancer. You can't be charged more if you're a woman. You can't be charged just because your job makes your back hurt sometimes. Those days are over. [*Laughter*]

More Americans are signing up for new private health insurance plans every day. Already, 3 million people have signed up. So if you know somebody who isn't covered, who doesn't have health insurance, call them up, sit them down, help them get covered at health-care.gov by March 31.

So this is the opportunity agenda that I'm going to be talking about this year. I don't know—I hope Congress will be talking about it too. But I'm not going to wait. Because we've got to restore some economic security in a 21st-century economy, and that means jobs that are more plentiful, skills that are more employable, savings that are more portable, health care that's yours and can't be canceled if you get sick.

I just focused on one piece of that opportunity agenda today: raising the minimum wage. But these are real, practical, achievable solu-

tions that can help shift the odds back in favor of working and middle class Americans who haven't been seeing some of the benefits of growth that we've seen over the last 4 years.

And before I grab a 10-pound barrel of pretzels and—[*laughter*—500 golf balls—[*laughter*—let me just leave you with something I heard from Costco's founder, Jim Sinegal, who's been a great friend of mine and somebody who I greatly admire. And Jim is rightly proud of everything he's accomplished. "But," he said, "here's the thing about the Costco story. We did not build our company in a vacuum. We built it in the greatest country on Earth. We built our company in a place where anyone can make it with hard work, a little luck, and a little help from their neighbors and their country."

That's what Jim said, a place where anyone can make it. That's who we are. That's our story. If we pull together, work together, put our shoulder to the wheel, keep moving forward, that's going to be our future as well and the future for our kids and our grandkids.

Thanks so much, everybody. God bless you. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:15 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Teresa Allen, assistant general manager, Costco's Woodmore Towne Centre Warehouse, who introduced the President; and Lilly Ledbetter, former employee, Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co. plant in Gadsden, AL. He also referred to his mother-in-law Marian Robinson.

Remarks at the United States Steel Corporation Mon Valley Works Irvin Plant in West Mifflin, Pennsylvania January 29, 2014

Hey! Hello, everybody. Well, thank you, Mario, for that great introduction and your leadership. You just don't come to the Steel City without coming to U.S. Steel. I just got a great tour and had a chance to see a little bit about how you guys build America every single day. And I could not be prouder to be here.

I brought a few friends with me. We've got America's Treasury Secretary, Jack Lew. We've got a couple of guys who wake up and go to bat for Pennsylvania workers every single day, Senator Bob Casey and Congressman Mike Doyle. We've got the mayor of West Mifflin, Chris Kelly, in the house. Pittsburgh's new