

Attorney General-designate Sally Quillian Yates; his brother William Holder; and his sisters-in-law Deborah Holder, Margie Malone Tuckson, Joyce Phillips, and Gwen Moseby.

Statement on the Death of Theodore M. Hesburgh *February 27, 2015*

Michelle and I were saddened to learn of the passing of Father Ted Hesburgh. During his lifetime of service to his country, his church, and his beloved University of Notre Dame, Father Hesburgh inspired generations of young men and women to lead with the courage of their convictions. His deep and abiding faith in a loving God and in the power of our shared humanity led him to join the first-ever United States Civil Rights Commission and join hands with Dr. King to sing “We Shall Overcome.” His belief that what unites us is greater than what divides us made him a champion of academic freedom and open debate.

When I delivered the commencement address at Notre Dame in 2009, I was honored to thank Father Hesburgh for his contributions to our country and our world. Father Hesburgh often spoke of his beloved university as both a lighthouse and a crossroads: the lighthouse standing apart, shining with the wisdom of the Catholic tradition; and the crossroads joining the differences of culture, religion, and conviction with friendship, civility, and love. The same can be said of the man generations of students knew simply as Father Ted. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family, his friends, and the Notre Dame community that loved him so dearly.

Statement on the Death of Leonard S. Nimoy *February 27, 2015*

Long before being nerdy was cool, there was Leonard Nimoy. Leonard was a lifelong lover of the arts and humanities, a supporter of the sciences, generous with his talent and his time. And of course, Leonard was Spock: cool, logical, big eared, and level headed, the center of Star Trek’s optimistic, inclusive vision of humanity’s future. I loved Spock.

In 2007, I had the chance to meet Leonard in person. It was only logical to greet him with the Vulcan salute, the universal sign for “Live long and prosper.” And after 83 years on this planet—and on his visits to many others—it’s clear Leonard Nimoy did just that. Michelle and I join his family, friends, and countless fans who miss him so dearly today.

Statement on the Death of Boris Efimovich Nemtsov *February 27, 2015*

The United States condemns the brutal murder of Boris Nemtsov. And we call upon the Russian Government to conduct a prompt, impartial, and transparent investigation into the circumstances of his murder and ensure that those responsible for this vicious killing are brought to justice.

Nemtsov was a tireless advocate for his country, seeking for his fellow Russian citizens the

rights to which all people are entitled. I admired Nemtsov’s courageous dedication to the struggle against corruption in Russia and appreciated his willingness to share his candid views with me when we met in Moscow in 2009.

We offer our sincere condolences to Boris Efimovich’s family and to the Russian people, who have lost one of the most dedicated and eloquent defenders of their rights.

The President's Weekly Address *February 28, 2015*

Hi, everybody. In America, we believe that a lifetime of hard work and responsibility should be rewarded with a shot at a secure, dignified retirement. It's one of the critical components of middle class life, and this week, I took new steps to protect it.

Six years after the crisis that shook a lot of people's faith in a secure retirement, our economy is steadily growing. Last year was the best year for job growth since the 1990s. All told, over the past 5 years, the private sector has added nearly 12 million new jobs. And since I took office, the stock market has more than doubled, replenishing the 401(k)s of millions of families.

But while we've come a long way, we've got more work to do to make sure that our recovery reaches more Americans, not just those at the top. That's what middle class economics is all about: the idea that this country does best when everyone gets their fair shot, everybody does their fair share, and everyone plays by the same set of rules.

That last part—making sure everyone plays by the same set of rules—is why we passed historic Wall Street reform and a credit card bill of rights. It's why we created a new consumer watchdog agency. And it's why we're taking new action to protect hard-working families' retirement security. If you're working hard and putting away money, you should have the peace of mind that the financial advice you're getting is sound and that your investments are protected.

But right now there are no rules of the road. Many financial advisers put their clients' interest first, but some financial advisers get backdoor payments and hidden fees in exchange for steering people into bad investments. All told, bad advice that results from these conflicts of

interest costs middle class families and working families about \$17 billion every year.

So this week, I called on the Department of Labor to change that, to update the rules and require that retirement advisers put the best interests of their clients above their own financial interests. Middle class families cannot afford to lose their hard-earned savings after a lifetime of work. They deserve to be treated with fairness and respect. And that's what this rule would do.

While many financial advisers support these basic safeguards to prevent abuse, I know some special interests will fight this with everything they've got. But while we welcome different perspectives and ideas on how to move forward, what I won't accept is the notion that there's nothing we can do to make sure that hard-working, responsible Americans who scrimp and save can retire with security and dignity.

We're going to keep pushing for this rule, because it's the right thing to do for our workers and for our country. After all, the strength of our economy rests on whether hard-working families can not only share in America's success, but can also contribute to America's success. And that's what I will never stop fighting for: an economy where everyone who works hard has the chance to get ahead.

Thanks, and have a great weekend.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 2:55 p.m. on February 27 in the Library at the White House for broadcast on February 28. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 27, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on February 28.

Statement on the Death of Minnie Minoso

March 1, 2015

For South Siders and Sox fans all across the country, including me, Minnie Minoso is and will always be “Mr. White Sox.”

The first Black Major Leaguer in Chicago, Minnie came to the United States from Cuba even though he could have made more money elsewhere. He came up through the Negro Leagues and didn’t speak much English at first. And as he helped to integrate baseball in the 1950s, he was a target of racial slurs from fans and opponents, sometimes forced to stay in different motels from his teammates. But his speed, his power, and his resilient optimism

earned him multiple All-Star appearances and Gold Gloves in left field, and he became one of the most dominant and dynamic players of the 1950s.

Minnie may have been passed over by the Baseball Hall of Fame during his lifetime, but for me and for generations of Black and Latino young people, Minnie’s quintessentially American story embodies far more than a plaque ever could.

Michelle and I send our thoughts and prayers to his family and fans in Chicago, Cleveland, and around the world.

Remarks Following a Meeting With the President’s Task Force on 21st-Century Policing and an Exchange With Reporters

March 2, 2015

The President. Last year, the events in Ferguson and New York exposed a deep-rooted frustration in many communities of color around the need for fair and just law enforcement. And so back in December, I announced a Task Force on 21st-Century Policing, chaired by two outstanding leaders who are respected both in law enforcement and in civil rights circles: Philadelphia Police Commissioner Charles Ramsey and former Assistant Attorney General Laurie Robinson. And I asked them to help to form a Task Force made up of community leaders, law enforcement leaders, academics, practitioners, and to come up in 90 days with a very specific set of recommendations that would allow us to continue to drive crime down, to continue to deal with issues of community building, but would begin to build the kind of trust that we need in order to continue to make progress in the future.

For the last few months, they’ve been holding hearings. They met with people who care passionately about these issues. They’ve debated recommendations thoughtfully and deliberately. Some put their lives on hold for more than 2 months to do this. I am extraordinarily grateful for their efforts.

This morning they presented to me their report, which will be available online for everybody to see. It offers pragmatic, commonsense ideas based on input from criminal justice experts, community leaders, law enforcement, and civil liberties advocates. We are carefully reviewing all their recommendations, which include very specific recommendations, more general recommendations, everything from training issues to technology issues, to approaches for interacting with schools, to how we get research and data. But I want to summarize just a few key points that were made so that people are very clear about the direction that we’re going to be moving.

Number one, I think uniformly, the Task Force talked about the issue of legitimacy as being important not just for the communities, but also for law enforcement officers. That the more there is trust between communities and law enforcement, the safer it is for cops, the more effectively they can do their jobs, the more cooperation there’s going to be, the more likely those communities are to be safe. And so there is no theoretical separation between the interests of community and law enforcement.

But obviously, the devil is in the details, and we've got to figure out how to make that work.

Number two, there was a great emphasis on the need to collect more data. Across this country, we've got 18,000 law enforcement jurisdictions. Right now we do not have a good sense, and local communities do not have a good sense, of how frequently there may be interactions with police and community members that result in a death, result in a shooting. That's the kind of information that is needed for police departments to do their job, to be able to manage their forces effectively, and for communities to be able to evaluate and provide appropriate oversight to the folks who are supposed to be serving and protecting them.

There was a lot of discussion about the need for expanding and enhancing community policing that we know works. When I had several law enforcement officers from around the country the other day, almost all of them—and this is a diverse group, some from big cities, some from small communities, some from tribal areas—they all discussed the need for police officers to be engaged with the community, not just in a stop, but also in a school, also working with children, also being seen as enhancing the life of the community beyond law enforcement. That trust then enhances their ability to do a good job. And that's an area that was emphasized by this Task Force.

There's a great interest in training. We know some things that work, but we need more information to find out how to take to scale best practices when it comes to training so that police officers are able to work in a way that reduces the possibilities of bias, that allows them to deal with what are very stressful situations. Oftentimes, police officers have extraordinarily difficult jobs. They may be put in situations in which there's a lot of tension. And how do they deal with that appropriately, and how do they work with the community effectively to mitigate some of those challenges?

There are going to be some controversial recommendations in here. For example, the need for independent investigations and independent or special prosecutors when there is a

situation in which law enforcement has interacted with an individual that results in death.

[At this point, Task Force Cochair Laurie Robinson coughed.]

I'm going to give Laurie some water right now—[laughter]—because I think it's important. She's been working very hard. [Laughter] And Michelle has that same cough.

But the importance of making sure that there is a sense of accountability when, in fact, law enforcement is involved in a deadly shooting is something that I think communities across the board are going to need to consider. There were some recommendations around prohibiting racial profiling. That's a step that we've already taken at the Federal level. If you talk to the FBI, if you talk to our Federal law enforcement, it may be challenging for them to change old practices, but they are confident that they're able to continue to do their job effectively. The same is going to be true at the local level as long as it is an intentional policy coming from the top that is followed up with key metrics so the people know exactly what is going on.

And then there is some discussions of technology. There's been a lot of talk about body cameras as a silver bullet or a solution. I think the Task Force concluded that there is a role for technology to play in building additional trust and accountability, but it's not a panacea, and that it has to be embedded in a broader change in culture and a legal framework that ensures that people's privacy is respected and that not only police officers, but the community themselves feel comfortable with how technologies are being used.

There's some additional recommendations that are very specific. For example, how law enforcement handles mass demonstrations. I think there was a lot of concern that bubbled up in the wake of Ferguson. The Federal Government has already taken it upon itself to look at how we are dealing with providing military equipment to local law enforcement and how that may be used. There are some recommendations that deal with civilian oversight and how that might be managed.

The point is that this report is going to contain a series of very specific, concrete, commonsense efforts for us to build trust. It will be good for police, and it will be good for the communities involved. And as a consequence, it will be good for the country. Everybody wants our streets safe, and everybody wants to make sure that laws are applied fairly and equitably.

Nobody, by the way, wants that more than law enforcement themselves. I was keenly interested in hearing from some of our law enforcement representatives who talked about how important it is for police to feel as if the community supports them, because they got into law enforcement to serve and protect, not to be viewed as some external force. And unfortunately, sometimes policies, politics, politicians put law enforcement in an untenable position.

There was some discussion about—within the report about how we have to look at the broader context in which law enforcement is happening. Our approach to our drug laws, for example, and criminalization of nonviolent offenses rather than taking more of a public health approach, that may be something that has an impact in eroding trust between law enforcement and communities. Issues—broader issues of poverty and isolation may have an impact. I emphasized to the Task Force that I think it's important for us to recognize that context, but I don't want us to have such a 40,000-foot argument that we lose track of the very specific concrete practices that can be instituted right now that will make a difference.

Now, last point I'll make: Most of the recommendations that have been made are directed at the 18,000 law enforcement jurisdictions that are out there. Law enforcement is largely a local function as opposed to a Federal function. Many of the recommendations that have been made for changes in Federal practice we already have enjoin. Those that we do not yet have enjoin, that we have not yet implemented, I'm going to be asking Eric Holder and the Justice Department and his successor to go through all these recommendations so that we can start implementing them.

I know that one area that's going to be of great interest is whether we can expand the

COPS program that in the past has been very effective, continues to be effective, but is largely underfunded, to see if we can get more incentives for local communities to apply some of the best practices and lessons that are embodied in this report.

But a lot of our work is going to involve local police chiefs, local elected officials, States recognizing that the moment is now for us to make these changes. We have a great opportunity, coming out of some great conflict and tragedy, to really transform how we think about community law enforcement relations so that everybody feels safer and our law enforcement officers feel, rather than being embattled, feel fully supported.

We need to seize that opportunity. And so this is something that I'm going to stay very focused on in the months to come. I'm going to be pushing my Justice Department and the COPS program and others to continue to work on it. But I want to close by just once again saying thank you to the extraordinary contributions that have been made by this Task Force.

I expect our friends in the media to really focus on what's in this report and pay attention to it. So often we see an event that's flashy. It makes the news. People are crying out for solutions. And by the time recommendations are put forward, our focus has moved on and we don't actually see and pay attention to the concrete ways that we can improve the situation. This is a moment where a lot of work has been done. There's some good answers to be had if we don't make this a political football or sensationalize it, but rather really focus on getting the job done.

So I appreciate everybody's efforts. I'm going to be focused on it. I hope you will be too.

Thank you very much, everybody.

Q. Surely you don't mean us, do you?

The President. You pay attention, personally. It's more generically.

Thank you, guys.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:09 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the audio was incomplete.

Statement on Senator Barbara A. Mikulski's Decision Not To Seek Reelection March 2, 2015

Senator Mikulski is more than just a legendary Senator for the people of Maryland, she's an institution in the United States Senate. Barbara's service to the people of Maryland spans decades, but her legacy will span generations. Barbara is the longest serving woman in Congress, and her leadership serves as an inspiration to millions of women and girls across the globe to stand up and lead.

As the chairwoman and now vice chairwoman of the Senate's Appropriations Committee, Barbara has always known that our budgets should reflect our deepest held values. In that spirit, Barbara has wielded her gavel and used

her booming voice to advocate on behalf of paycheck fairness, childcare, health care, education, women's rights, and countless issues that have contributed to the strength of America's families. Thanks to her leadership, more women excel in their careers, more children have access to quality education, more families have health insurance, and more people are treated fairly under the law. I look forward to working with Senator Mikulski over the course of the next 2 years, and Michelle and I extend our warmest wishes to Barbara in her next endeavors.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Secretary of Defense Ashton B. Carter and an Exchange With Reporters March 3, 2015

The President. Well, this is going to be the first opportunity that I have to get an extensive debriefing from Secretary Carter, who took a trip last week to Afghanistan and other parts of the region. He'll be giving me some impressions about how we're planning our drawdown and transition in Afghanistan and talk about some other regional issues.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel's Address to the U.S. Congress/Iran

One issue that we will be discussing is Iran. And obviously, that's been a topic of great interest today, so let me just make a couple comments on that. I did not have a chance to watch Prime Minister Netanyahu's speech. I was on a video conference with our European partners with respect to Ukraine. I did have a chance to take a look at the transcript, and as far as I can tell, there was nothing new.

The Prime Minister, I think, appropriately pointed out that the bond between the United States of America is unbreakable, and on that point, I thoroughly agree. He also pointed out that Iran has been a dangerous regime and

continues to engage in activities that are contrary to the interests of the United States, to Israel, and to the region. And on that, we agree. He also pointed out the fact that Iran has repeatedly threatened Israel and engaged in the most venomous of anti-Semitic statements. And no one can dispute that.

But on the core issue, which is how do we prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, which would make it far more dangerous and would give it scope for even greater action in the region, the Prime Minister didn't offer any viable alternatives. So let's be clear about what exactly the central concern should be, both for the United States and for Israel.

I've said since before I became President that one of my primary goals in foreign policy would be preventing Iran from getting nuclear weapons. And with the help of Congress and our international partners, we constructed an extraordinarily effective sanctions regime that pressured Iran to come to the table to negotiate in a serious fashion. They have now been negotiating over the last year, and during that period, Iran has, in fact, frozen its program, rolled back some of its most dangerous highly

enriched uranium, and subjected itself to the kinds of verifications and inspections that we had not previously seen. Keep in mind that when we shaped that interim deal, Prime Minister Netanyahu made almost the precise same speech about how dangerous that deal was going to be. And yet, over a year later, even Israeli intelligence officers and, in some cases, members of the Israeli Government, have to acknowledge that, in fact, it has kept Iran from further pursuing its nuclear program.

Now, the deal that we are trying to negotiate, that is not yet completed, would cut off the different pathways for Iran to advance its nuclear capabilities. It would roll back some elements of its program. It would ensure that it did not have what we call a breakout capacity that was shorter than a year's time. And it would subject Iran to the most vigorous inspections and verifications regimes that have ever been put in place.

And the alternative that the Prime Minister offers is no deal, in which case Iran will immediately begin once again pursuing its nuclear program, accelerate its nuclear program, without us having any insight into what they're doing and without constraint. And his essential argument is that if we just double down on sanctions, Iran won't want to do that.

Well, we have evidence from the past decade that sanctions alone are not sufficient to prevent Iran from pursuing its nuclear ambitions. And if it, in fact, does not have some sense that sanctions will be removed, it will not have an interest in avoiding the path that it's currently on.

So the bottom line is this: We don't yet have a deal. It may be that Iran cannot say yes to a good deal. I have repeatedly said that I would rather have no deal than a bad deal. But if we're successful in negotiating, then in fact, this will be the best deal possible to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Nothing else comes close. Sanctions won't do it. Even military action would not be as successful as the deal that we have put forward.

And I think it is very important not to be distracted by the nature of the Iranian regime's ambitions when it comes to territory or terrorism, all issues which we share a concern with Israel about and are working consistently with Israel on. Because we know that if in fact they obtained a nuclear weapon, all those problems would be worse.

So we're staying focused on the central issue here: How do we prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon? The path that we've proposed, if successful, by far is the best way to do that. That's demonstrable. And Prime Minister Netanyahu has not offered any kind of viable alternative that would achieve the same verifiable mechanism to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon.

So I would urge the Members of Congress who were there to continue to express their strong support for Israel's security, to continue to express their strong interest in providing the assistance Israel needs to repel attacks. I think it's important for Members of Congress, on a bipartisan basis, to be unified in pushing back against terrorism in the region and the destabilizing efforts that Iran may have engaged in with our partners. Those are all things in which this administration and Israel agree.

But when it comes to this nuclear deal, let's wait until there's actually a deal on the table that Iran has agreed to, at which point everybody can evaluate it; we don't have to speculate. And what I can guarantee is that if it's a deal I've signed off on, I will be able to prove that it is the best way for us to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon.

And for us to pass up on that potential opportunity would be a grave mistake. It's not one that I intend to make, and I will take that case to every Member of Congress once we actually have a deal. All right?

[At this point, several reporters asked the President questions at once.]

The President. Go ahead. Hold on, hold on. Hold on a second. Hold on. I'll take one question from Julie [Julie Pace, Associated Press]. Go ahead.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel's Address to the U.S. Congress/Speaker of the House of Representatives John A. Boehner/Israel-U.S. Relations/Iran

Q. Thank you. Now that you've had a chance to read the Prime Minister's remarks at least, do you feel like the speech he gave was appropriate, considering his upcoming elections and the upcoming deadline? And you also talked to other foreign leaders today in the call on Ukraine. Did Iran come up at all, and are you expecting any signs of support from them vis-à-vis your position versus the Prime Minister?

The President. No. The—well, all the folks on the call today share my position that we should see if we can get this deal done. It was not a topic of conversation.

With respect to the decision of the Speaker to offer up the House Chamber 2 weeks before Mr. Netanyahu's election to make this case, I think that question should be directed to Mr. Boehner.

As I said, it is very important for us not to politicize the relationship between Israel and the United States. It's very important for all of us Americans to realize that we have a system of government in which foreign policy runs through the executive branch and the President, not through other channels.

And I think it's important for us to stay focused on the problem at hand. And the specific problem that is being debated right now is not whether we trust the Iranian regime or not, it—we don't trust them. It's not whether Iran engages in destabilizing activities—everybody agrees

with that. The central question is, how can we stop them from getting a nuclear weapon?

And what we know is that if we're able to get a deal, not only do we cut off all the various pathways for Iran getting a nuclear weapon, but we also know that we'll have a verification mechanism and an inspection mechanism where, if they cheat and if they engage in a covert program, we are far more likely to see it in time to do something about it.

What I also know is, if we don't have a deal, as Prime Minister Netanyahu suggested—if in fact he's right that they're not trustworthy, they intend to pursue a covert program, and they cheat—we'll be far less aware of it until it is potentially too late.

What I also know is, is that he made the same argument before this current interim deal, and even his officials in his own government had had to acknowledge that Iran has in fact maintained their end of the bargain.

So what I'm focused on right now is solving this problem. I'm not focused on the politics of it, I'm not focused on the theater of it. And my strong suggestion would be that Members of Congress, as they evaluate it, stay similarly focused.

All right. Thank you, guys.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:40 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom; President François Hollande of France; Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany; Prime Minister Matteo Renzi of Italy; and President Donald Tusk of the European Council.

Remarks on the "Let Girls Learn" Initiative

March 3, 2015

The President. Thank you so much. Everybody, have a seat. Everybody, have a seat. Thank you, Charlene, for that terrific introduction, for everything that you've done to help those young girls in Liberia and all the young women I hope that are inspired here in the United States by seeing your example. We couldn't be prouder—except for your mom. She's prouder. [*Laughter*] Mom is here. So—

and we know that you're just getting started, so you're going to do amazing things in the future.

I want to thank the Members of Congress who are here today, including Congresswoman Kay Granger, who's a leading advocate for development done right. Where is Kay? She was here just a second ago. She had to run back to vote on Homeland Security. So we really wanted to get her there on time. [*Laughter*]

I also want to mention Congresswoman Nita Lowey, who is also in the midst of this Department of Homeland Security vote, but has championed the cause of global education for girls in the United States, around the globe—and in the Obama household. [Laughter] Michelle Obama. [Applause] Yay!

Now, my job is pretty easy. I am here to introduce her. [Laughter] An extraordinary woman—[laughter]—a passionate advocate for girls in the United States, around the globe—and in the Obama household. [Laughter] Michelle Obama. [Applause] Yay!

And in just a minute, she's going to announce a piece of this new initiative, which is sure to make Charlene and her fellow Peace Corps volunteers excited to get back to work. But before I turn it over to Michelle, I figure, you need a man's perspective. [Laughter] So I want to talk a little bit about why we all need to care about letting girls learn.

Now, I wish I could just say, because they've got the same potential as boys. It's pretty straightforward, and we could just stop there. This really should not be complicated. Wherever they live, whoever they are, every girl on this planet has value. Every girl on this planet deserves to be treated with dignity and equality. And that includes the chance to develop her mind and her talents and to live a life of her own choosing, to chart her own destiny. That may be obvious to us, but we know it's not obvious to everyone. Sixty-two million girls around the world who should be in school are not. That's not by accident. It's the direct result of barriers, large and small, that stand in the way of girls who want to learn.

In some cases, their families can't afford the school fees. In some cases, the only local school doesn't have a girls' restroom. Maybe the risk of being hurt or kidnapped or killed by men who will do anything to stop girls from learning is just too great. Maybe girls aren't in school because they're expected to get married and become mothers while they're still teens or even earlier. Even today, in too many parts of the world, girls are valued more for their bodies than for their minds. That's not just antiquated. It's not just a bad strategy for any

country that's serious about growing their economy or promoting stability. It is just plain wrong. And we have to do more to stop it.

Now, I'm proud to say that the United States already does a great deal to support girls' education around the world. But what we do we tend to do quietly. It doesn't get a lot of publicity. And what we determined—what she determined—[laughter].

The First Lady. We all determined.

The President. What we all determined is that we've got to take this work to the next level and tie all our different programs together in a single, coordinated strategy. And that's what this initiative is about.

Our diplomats and development experts are hard at work. We're making it clear to any country that's our partner or wants to be our partner that they need to get serious about increasing the number of girls in school. We are looking for every opportunity to put our partnerships with NGOs and businesses and foundations to work every day on behalf of girls everywhere. So this will be, yes, a focus of the First Lady's, but it's also going to be a focus of the President of the United States. And we expect results, because this matters to all of us.

And just to be clear, I come to this issue as a concerned citizen, but also as the leader of the world's largest economy and the Commander of—in Chief of the world's most powerful military. And I'm convinced that a world in which girls are educated is a safer, more stable, more prosperous place.

And the evidence is compelling. We know that when girls are educated, they're more likely to delay marriage. Their future children, as a consequence, are more likely to be healthy and better nourished. Their future wages increase, which, in turn, strengthens the security of their family. And national growth gets a boost as well.

From a political standpoint and a security standpoint, places where women and girls are treated as full and equal citizens tend to be more stable, tend to be more democratic. So this is not just a humanitarian issue, this is an economic issue, and it is a security issue. And that's why it has to be a foreign policy priority.

Now, I will confess, I also come to this as the father of two fabulous, extraordinary, awesome young women. [Laughter] They've got a lot to offer to the world. And what we know is, is that everywhere, there are girls just like Malia and Sasha. They're funny, and they're caring, and they're inquisitive, and they're strong, and their heads are buzzing with ideas. And they're constantly changing their minds about what they're going to do when they grow up because there are just so many things they could be doing and want to do and want to explore.

What an extraordinary privilege it is to be the father of those two girls, to watch them learn and grow and become strong and capable women. And I want to make sure that no girl out there is denied her chance to be a strong, capable woman—woman with the resources that she needs to succeed, that no girl is prevented from making her unique contributions to the world. Every child is precious. Every girl is precious. Every girl deserves an education.

And that's the message that we want to deliver here today and we're going to sustain over the next 2 years and beyond: Let girls learn.

Now, to say more about why and how we're going to do this—[laughter]—let me step aside for a very strong and capable woman: the First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama. [Laughter] Thank you. Yay! [Laughter]

The First Lady. Thank you all so much. Thank you, guys. Thank you.

President Obama. Yay!

The First Lady. Yay! [Laughter] Well, you guys, thank you. We are excited. This is good stuff. And I want to thank Barack Obama for that—[laughter]—for that wonderful introduction. He doesn't always get to introduce me a lot, so I like to watch him say good things about me. [Laughter] It's a really nice thing. But as you can hear from his passion, I'm just so grateful that he is such a champion for our girls—all our girls—not just for Malia and Sasha, but for every girl. And he does it every day as President, and he does it even better as a father. And I am proud of him.

I also want to recognize Ambassador Rice and Representatives Granger and Lowey, who had to leave; Valerie Jarrett for her tremen-

dous leadership on this issue. I want to also thank Charlene for her great work, just an inspiring young person doing terrific things. Just an example of why this initiative is so important, all the outstanding work she's doing to give girls worldwide the education they deserve.

And I want to thank all of you for the work that you all are doing. For years, you all have been working at the grassroots, one family, one community, one girl at a time. And you've been driven all along by a fundamental belief about how change really happens, a belief that Barack and I share: that true change doesn't happen from the top down, it happens from the bottom up

And as I've traveled the world over the past 6 years, I've seen time and again how our young people—particularly our girls—are so often pushed to the very bottom of their societies. Everywhere I go, I meet these girls, and they are so fiercely intelligent and hungry to make something of themselves. These girls are our change makers, our future doctors and teachers and entrepreneurs. They're our dreamers and our visionaries who could change the world as we know it.

Just take the example of Malala Yousafzai. All it takes is 30 seconds in a room with this young woman to realize what a blessing she is to our world. And Malala would be the first to tell you that she is not unique, that there are millions of girls around the world just like her. These girls know they have the spark of something extraordinary inside of them, but too often, that spark is snuffed out by circumstances of their birth or the norms of their communities.

And that's where this issue becomes personal for me and for Barack, because I see myself in these girls. I see our daughters in these girls. And like all of you, I just can't walk away from them. Like you, I can't just sit back and accept the barriers that keep them from realizing their promise. So I know that I want to use my time and my platform as First Lady and beyond to make a real impact on this issue. I want to lift up the extraordinary work all of you have been doing long before I came to this issue,

and I want to bring new resources and new partners to this effort.

And in recent years, I've worked with my staff, and we've consulted with so many of you, to ask how I can be most helpful. And folks from CARE and Brookings, the Global Partnership for Education, the National Peace Corps Association, and so many others—you guys have stepped up. And time and again, you have told me that whether—whatever these obstacles these girls face—whether it's school fees or violence or cultural beliefs that girls simply aren't worthy of an education—you've said that these problems will not be fixed from on high, that these are community challenges that call for community solutions.

And that made a lot of sense to me, and it made a lot of sense to my husband, because that's the kind of work we did long before we came to the White House, back when Barack was a community organizer and I was running a little nonprofit AmeriCorps program in Chicago.

So with the help of many of you in this room, and in collaboration with the Peace Corps, I am thrilled to announce that as part of "Let Girls Learn," we're going to be launching a new community-focused girls' education initiative across the globe. This effort will draw on the talent and energy of the nearly 7,000 Peace Corps volunteers serving in more than 60 countries.

Through this effort, Peace Corps will be supporting hundreds of new community projects to help girls go to school and stay in school, everything from after-school mentoring to girls' leadership camps, to entrepreneurial projects like Bosh Bosh that Charlene talked about, and many more.

And I want to emphasize that these programs will be community generated and community led. They'll be based on solutions devised by local leaders, families and, yes, even the girls themselves. And you can learn more about these projects and how to support these efforts at letgirlslearn.peacecorps.gov.

As part of this effort, the Peace Corps is also going to be eventually training all of its volunteers about gender and girls' education. So

even volunteers who are focusing on other issues like health care or agriculture can also help support girls' education on the ground.

In other words, Peace Corps will soon be bringing new expertise and leadership on girls' education into every single community they serve. So while the focus of this effort will be local, because of this work, the scope will be global and the impact will truly be generational.

I mean, if you think about what the Peace Corps means to so many, just think about the many leaders in developing countries—businesswomen, politicians, activists—who can trace their journey back to a Peace Corps volunteer who inspired them and invested in them. And think about the kind of daughters these leaders are now raising. Think about all the other women and girls these leaders are inspiring today. That's the kind of impact that this initiative can have.

And I am so excited to kick this effort off with a trip later this month to Japan and Cambodia. I'll be starting with a visit with Mrs. Akie Abe, the wife of Japan's Prime Minister, who also shares our passion for girls' education and is eager to partner with us in this work. I'll also be meeting with our Ambassador to Japan, Caroline Kennedy, who just happens to be the daughter of the President who started the Peace Corps. And in Cambodia, I'll be meeting with Peace Corps volunteers and visiting a school where community-driven solutions are changing girls' lives.

But while the focus of this work is international, I just want to be clear that for me, "Let Girls Learn" isn't just about improving girls' education abroad. It's also about reminding our young people of the hunger they should be feeling for their own education here at home.

You see, through "Let Girls Learn," I hope that more of our girls—and our boys—here in the U.S. will learn about the sacrifices girls worldwide are making to get their education, how they're pushing forward in the face of poverty and violence, death threats, and so many other horrors. I want our young people to be awed by these girls. But more importantly, I want them to be inspired and motivated by these girls.

I want our kids to realize that while their own school may be far from perfect—and believe you me, this guy here is working hard to fix that—they still have an obligation to show up every day to that classroom and learn as much as they can. I want our kids to understand the transformative power of education. That’s something that Barack and I understand from our own experiences. That’s our life story: how a good education can lift you from the most humble circumstances into a life you never could have imagined.

And finally, I want our kids in this country to be citizens of the world. I want them to connect with and learn from kids in every corner of the globe.

That’s why, when I travel abroad, I use all kinds of social media and technology to reach back here to young people at home. And I’m going to be doing so again during my trip to Asia, working with PBS and Girls Rising and Girl Scouts and—yay!—[laughter]—so many other great partners because I want our young people to learn about the world and dream of being Peace Corps volunteers and diplomats and international business leaders and more. I want all our young people here in the U.S. and around the globe to dream big dreams, as my husband always says, dream big dreams for themselves. I want them to have big, ambitious futures.

And I know that’s possible, no matter what obstacles they face, because I’ve seen it again and again in the most unlikely places. The Martin Luther King Girls Secondary School,

which I visited last year in Senegal, is a wonderful example. The school was concrete floor classrooms, rooms containing little more than desks and a few faded posters. But, oh, those girls, man, they were fierce, ambitious, confident. They had serious dreams for their future.

One of the girls wrote a poem about those dreams. And she said it was about a world free from pollution and global warming, a world where violence and wars would be replaced by mutual acceptance and tolerance and love. The poem ended with this line: She said, “I have a dream that one day, the Martin Luther King Girls School of Dakar, my school, will be as prestigious as Harvard and Princeton Universities.” [Laughter] Yes.

So we owe these girls, and girls like them across the globe, an education worthy of those dreams. So I am so proud to join this movement. I’m honored to learn more from all of you. I am inspired by you. And I’m excited to roll up my sleeves and work hard with you over the next few years and beyond. So let’s get to work.

Thank you all.

President Obama. Yay! Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:02 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Charlene Espinoza, volunteer, U.S. Peace Corps. The First Lady referred to National Security Adviser Susan E. Rice; and Nobel Prize winner and education activist Malala Yousafzai.

Statement on Congressional Passage of Legislation To Fund the Department of Homeland Security

March 3, 2015

Every day, the men and women of the Department of Homeland Security work to secure our borders, respond to disasters, guard our coasts, protect our cybersecurity, and keep our ports and airports safe. They’re law enforcement professionals and brave patriots who do a remarkable job and deserve our gratitude and respect. Today, after far too

long, Congress finally voted to fully fund their mission. To make sure the Americans who protect our country and our people have the resources they need to get the job done, I will sign this bill into law as soon as I receive it.

NOTE: The statement referred to H.R. 240.

Message to the Congress on Continuation of the National Emergency With Respect to Ukraine

March 3, 2015

To the Congress of the United States:

Section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1622(d)) provides for the automatic termination of a national emergency unless, within 90 days prior to the anniversary date of its declaration, the President publishes in the *Federal Register* and transmits to the Congress a notice stating that the emergency is to continue in effect beyond the anniversary date. In accordance with this provision, I have sent to the *Federal Register* for publication the enclosed notice stating that the national emergency declared in Executive Order 13660 of March 6, 2014, is to continue in effect beyond March 6, 2015.

The actions and policies of persons that undermine democratic processes and institutions in Ukraine; threaten its peace, security, stability, sovereignty, and territorial integrity; and

contribute to the misappropriation of its assets, as well as the actions and policies of the Government of the Russian Federation, including its purported annexation of Crimea and its use of force in Ukraine, continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States. Therefore, I have determined that it is necessary to continue the national emergency declared in Executive Order 13660 with respect to Ukraine.

BARACK OBAMA

The White House,
March 3, 2015.

NOTE: The notice is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Message to the Congress on Continuation of the National Emergency With Respect to Zimbabwe

March 3, 2015

To the Congress of the United States:

Section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1622(d)) provides for the automatic termination of a national emergency unless, within 90 days prior to the anniversary date of its declaration, the President publishes in the *Federal Register* and transmits to the Congress a notice stating that the emergency is to continue in effect beyond the anniversary date. In accordance with this provision, I have sent to the *Federal Register* for publication the enclosed notice stating that the national emergency declared in Executive Order 13288 of March 6, 2003, with respect to the actions and policies of certain members of the Government of Zimbabwe and other persons to undermine Zimbabwe's democratic processes or institutions is to continue in effect beyond March 6, 2015.

The threat constituted by the actions and policies of certain members of the Government of Zimbabwe and other persons to undermine Zimbabwe's democratic processes or institutions has not been resolved. These actions and policies continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the foreign policy of the United States. For these reasons, I have determined that it is necessary to continue this national emergency and to maintain in force the sanctions to respond to this threat.

BARACK OBAMA

The White House,
March 3, 2015.

NOTE: The notice is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Message to the Congress Designating Funds for Overseas Contingency Operations and Global Counterterrorism March 4, 2015

To the Congress of the United States:

In accordance with language under the heading “Coast Guard, Operating Expenses” of the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2015 (the “Act”), I hereby designate for Overseas Contingency Operations/Global War on Terrorism all funding so designated by the Congress in the Act pursuant to section 251(b)(2)(A) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of

1985, as amended, as outlined in the enclosed list of accounts.

The details of this action are set forth in the enclosed memorandum from the Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

BARACK OBAMA

The White House,
March 4, 2015.

Statement on the 45th Anniversary of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty March 5, 2015

Forty-five years ago today the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty entered into force. At the time that the treaty was signed, it was widely predicted that dozens of countries would develop nuclear weapons, a prospect that threatened to disrupt global stability and security. Instead, thanks to worldwide collective efforts and commitment, the NPT has become the cornerstone of the nuclear nonproliferation regime, reinforcing international peace and security and preventing the further spread of nuclear weapons, while promoting the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Today, global nuclear stockpiles are at their lowest levels since the 1950s.

As I stated in Prague in 2009, reinforced in Berlin in 2013, and again reaffirmed last month in my National Security Strategy, the United States seeks the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. We encourage all states to strengthen the NPT as a basis for international cooperation to achieve that shared goal. The NPT remains essential today, and our efforts to achieve nuclear disarmament cannot succeed unless we stand together to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and work for full compliance with the NPT. Our commitment to nonproliferation is at the center of our efforts, along with our P5-plus-1

partners, to reach a diplomatic agreement that prevents Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon and ensures that Iran’s nuclear program is peaceful.

The United States is meeting its NPT obligations and is committed to further strengthening the nonproliferation regime. During my administration, the United States has reduced the role nuclear weapons play in our security and reduced the size of our arsenal. Earlier this year we marked the fourth anniversary of the entry into force of the New START Treaty. Under New START and in conformity with our NPT obligations, we are reducing our strategic nuclear weapon stockpile to the lowest levels in more than a half century, and we are prepared to negotiate further reductions, while protecting our security and that of our friends and allies around the world.

We can only realize the full benefits of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy to advance development and protect the environment if we are confident that civil nuclear energy will not be diverted for weapons. For that, we depend on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to promote the safe, secure uses of nuclear energy and to ensure that it remains exclusively peaceful. As we prepare for the Ninth Review Conference of the NPT, the United

States stands ready to work with other NPT parties to achieve a successful outcome that reinforces the vitality of this treaty which is so fundamental to global security.

Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Town Hall Meeting at Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina March 6, 2015

The President. Hello, South Carolina! Thank you! Well, it is good to see everybody. It's good to be back in South Carolina. Now, you all—if you all have a seat, take a seat. If you don't have a seat, I'm sorry. [*Laughter*]

I want to say thank you to Benedict College for your hospitality. I want to thank Tiana for the great introduction. Give her a big round of applause. We have all kinds of luminaries and dignitaries and big shots here today—[*laughter*—but I'm going to just mention a couple of them: one of the finest gentlemen and finest legislators we have in the country, your congressman, Jim Clyburn; your outstanding mayor, Steve Benjamin; the president of this great institution, Dr. David Swinton. All right. Go Tigers!

It's been a while since I was in South Carolina. In fact, I got—it's been too long. It has. I'm not going to lie. I love you, and I've been loving you. It's just I've had a lot of stuff to do since I last saw you. But it was wonderful to be backstage because I got a chance to see so many of the wonderful people that I worked with back in 2008. If it was not for this great State, the Palmetto State, if it was not for all the people who had, at a grassroots level, gone door to door and talked to folks, got everybody fired up and ready to go, if it hadn't been for all of you, I might not be President. And I'm truly grateful for that. I'm truly grateful for that.

I hope that you don't mind, I also brought another good friend: the Attorney General of the United States, Eric Holder. We decided to take a Friday road trip together, because Eric has not only been a great friend, but an extraordinary Attorney General. As some of you know, he is going to go enjoy himself and has—is going to retire from public service. But I know he's still going to be doing great things

around the country. I'm really going to miss him.

Now, I am not here to make a long speech. I'm here to make a short speech, because what I want to do is spend most of my time interacting, having a conversation. I want to get questions; I want to hear what you guys are thinking about. This is a good thing for me, to get out of Washington and talk to normal folk. [*Laughter*]

And I thought it was appropriate to come here because tomorrow I'll be visiting Selma, Alabama, for the 50th anniversary of the march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. And one of the things I might talk about—I'm still working on my speech, but it might come up—is the meaning of Selma for your generation. Because Selma is not just about commemorating the past, it's about honoring the legends who helped change this country through your actions today, in the here and now. Selma is now. Selma is about the courage of ordinary people doing extraordinary things because they believe they can change the country, that they can shape our Nation's destiny. Selma is about each of us asking ourselves what we can do to make America better.

And historically, it's been young people like you who helped lead that march. You think about somebody like John Lewis who was one of the key leaders and will be joining us tomorrow. He was 23 when he helped lead that march that transformed the country. You think about the Children's Crusade in Birmingham or the 12-year-old boy who was elected head of the NAACP youth chapter who grew up to be Jim Clyburn. It was young people.

It was young people who stubbornly insisted on justice, stubbornly refused to accept the world as it is, that transformed not just the country, but transformed the world. You can see that spirit reflected in a poster put out by

the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee in the 1960s. It had a picture of a young John Lewis kneeling in protest against an all-White swimming pool. And it reads: “Come let us build a new world together.”

Come let us build a new world together. That’s the story of America. That’s why immigrants came here: the idea of building a new world together; not just settling on what is, but imagining what might be; insisting we live up to our highest ideals, our deepest values.

That’s why I wanted to come here to Columbia and here to Benedict College, because we all know we still have work to do. We’ve got to ensure not just the absence of formal, legal oppression, but the presence of an active, dynamic opportunity: good jobs that pay good wages, a good start for every child, health care for every family, a higher education that prepares you for the world without crippling you with debt, a fairer and more just legal and criminal justice system.

Now, the good news is, we’re in much better shape now than we were 6 years ago. This morning we learned that our economy created nearly 300,000 new jobs last month. The unemployment rate went down—[*applause*]—the unemployment rate ticked down to 5.5 percent, which is the lowest it’s been since the spring of 2008. Our businesses have now added more than 200,000 jobs a month for the past year. And we have not seen a streak like that in 37 years, since Jimmy Carter was President. So all told, over the past 5 years, our businesses have created nearly two—12 million new jobs.

And what’s more, the unemployment rate for African Americans is actually falling faster than the overall unemployment rate, which makes sense, because it went up faster, too, during the recession. But it’s still too high. The unemployment rate across the country and here in South Carolina is still higher than we want, which means we’ve got more work to do. And we’ve got to make sure those are good jobs that pay a living wage and have benefits with them.

So we can’t let up now. We’ve got to do everything we can to keep this progress going. This community, I know, is doing its part to

prepare students for this new economy. Programs like YouthBuild are giving young people who may have gotten off track a chance to earn a degree and get the skills they need for the for the 21st century. City Year AmeriCorps—[*applause*]—in the house. I see their jackets. They’re working with the public schools in Columbia to increase graduation rates. The Benedict College community is doing outstanding work beyond your walls. We put you on the Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. You earned that honor.

So as long as I’m President, we’re going to keep doing everything we can to make sure that young people like you can achieve your dreams. Now, we can’t do it for you; you’ve got to do it yourselves. But we can give you the tools you need. We can give you a little bit of a helping hand and a sense of possibility and direction. You got to do the work, but we can make it a little bit easier for you.

That’s why, 1 year ago, we launched what we call “My Brother’s Keeper.” It’s an initiative that challenges communities to bring together nonprofits and foundations and businesses and government, all focused on creating more pathways for young people to succeed. And this week, we put out a report showing the progress that’s been made. That progress is thanks to the nearly 200 local leaders who’ve accepted what we call My Brother’s Keeper’s Challenge, including Mayor Benjamin and the mayors of Johnston and Holly Hill. They’re doing great work mentoring young people, giving them a new path for success.

I’m hugely optimistic about the progress we can make together this year and in the years ahead, because ultimately, I’m optimistic about all of you. Young people in this country make me optimistic. The future we can build together. This new world that we can build together. I’m proud of you. But we’ve got a lot more work to do, starting right now, because I’m about to take your questions.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

All right, so, got to make sure the mike works. So here’s how this is going to work. You raise your hand. If I call on you, then wait for

the mike so everybody can hear your question. If you could stand up, introduce yourself. Try to keep your question relatively short. I'll try to keep my answer relatively short. That way we can get more questions and answers in. The only other thing—the only other rule is, we're going to go girl, boy, girl, boy, just to make it fair—[*laughter*—so it's not always just the boys thinking they know everything. [*Laughter*]

So who wants to start? She says it's her birthday, so we'll call on her first. All right. Here, wait for the microphone. Go ahead and stand up. We've got to be able to see you. Happy birthday.

Q. Thank you.

The President. What's your name?

Q. My name is Daranesha Hamilton. I really don't have a question, I just wanted you to talk to me. [*Laughter*]

The President. Okay. She doesn't have a question. Happy birthday. [*Laughter*] All right. Next time, you've got to have a question. [*Laughter*] But it is your birthday, so we're going to make an exception.

Woman right there in the back. We're going to go—I know I said boy, girl, boy, girl, but that didn't count because she didn't ask a question.

Right there, yes. Yes, you had your hand up. Yes. Right. Yes, you! Go ahead.

Keystone XL Pipeline Project/Climate Change

Q. Okay. Hello.

The President. Hello.

Q. I'm a native Chicagoan, and I welcome you.

The President. Well, what are you doing down here?

Q. I love it.

The President. It's warmer, isn't it?

Q. I'm down here to protect the environment.

The President. Okay.

Q. And I wanted to thank you for vetoing the XL Keystone pipeline. Thank you. Thank you! Thank you!

The President. Okay.

Q. You are what we worked for. You are what we hoped for.

The President. Well, that—I appreciate that. Do you have a question for me?

Q. Yes. Do you think that will stop the XL Keystone pipeline?

The President. Well, for those of you who haven't been following this, the Keystone pipeline is a proposed pipeline that runs from Canada through the United States down to the Gulf of Mexico. Its proponents argue that it would be creating jobs in the United States. But the truth is, it's Canadian oil that's then going to go to the world market. It will probably create about a couple thousand construction jobs for a year or two, but only create about 300 permanent jobs.

The reason that a lot of environmentalists are concerned about it is, the way that you get the oil out in Canada is an extraordinarily dirty way of extracting oil. And obviously, there are always risks in piping a lot of oil through Nebraska farmland and other parts of the country.

What we've done is, I vetoed it because the Congress was trying to short-circuit a traditional process that we go through. I haven't made a final determination on it, but what I've said is, is that we're not going to authorize a pipeline that benefits largely a foreign company if it can't be shown that it is safe and if it can't be shown that overall it would not contribute to climate change.

Now, a lot of young people here, you may not be worrying about climate change. Although it's very cold down here, you can't attribute a couple days of cold weather or a couple days of hot weather to the climate changing. But the pattern overall is that the planet is getting warmer. That's undeniable. And it's getting warmer at a faster rate than even the scientists expect.

And you might think, well, you know, getting warmer, that's not—no big deal. Folks in South Carolina, we're used to dealing with hot weather; we can manage. But understand that when you start having overall global temperatures go up, even if it means more snow in some places or more rain in some places—it's not going to be hotter every single place, but the overall temperature is going up—that starts changing weather patterns across the

globe. It starts raising ocean levels. It starts creating more drought and wildfires in some places.

It means that there are entire countries that may suddenly no longer be able to grow crops, which means people go hungry, which then creates conflict. It means diseases that used to be just in tropical places start creeping up, and suddenly, we've got a whole new set of, say, insect-borne diseases, like malaria, that we thought we had gotten rid of, now they're suddenly in places like the United States.

We start running out of water. It puts stresses and strains on our infrastructure. Hurricanes become more powerful when the water is warmer, which means a lot of our coastal cities and towns are put at risk.

I say all that because it may not be the thing that you are worried about right now. Right now you're worried about getting a job, or right now you're worried about is your girlfriend still mad at you—[laughter]—or right now you're thinking about just getting through classes and exams. I understand that. But what you have to appreciate, young people, is this will affect you more than old people like me. I'll be gone when the worst of this hits. And the disruptions—economic, social, security disruptions that it can cause can make your life and the lives of your children much harder and much worse. And if you don't stop it at a certain point, you can't stop it at all, and it could be catastrophic.

And I'm—I just want you to understand, what I just described, it's not science fiction, it's not speculation. This is what the science tells us. So we've got to worry about it, which is part of the reason why we've invested in things like green energy: trying to increase fuel efficiency standards on cars, trying to make sure that we use more solar and wind power, trying to find new energy sources that burn clean instead of dirty. And everybody here needs to be supportive and thinking about that because you're the ones who are going to have to live with it.

And what—I'm very proud of the fact that we've doubled the amount of clean energy produced since I've been President. We're in-

creasing fuel efficiency standards on cars, which will save you, by the way, money at the pump. Don't think that just because gas prices are low right now—that's nice, it puts some more money in your pocket, but that's not going to last. So don't start going out and saying, oh, I'm going to buy a big gas guzzler now—[laughter]—right? You—because the trajectory of the future is that gas—oil is going to get more expensive. It's going to get harder to extract. We're going to have to transition overtime to a new economy.

And there's huge opportunity. We can create a lot of jobs in those areas if we are focused on it and planning for it.

All right? But thank you very much for the question.

All right. It's a gentleman's turn. We've got any mikes back here? We've got the mike? I just wanted to make sure. Let's see. This young man right here in the red tie, looking sharp. [Laughter] You always wear a tie, or you just wore it today?

Q. I wear it often.

The President. Okay, good. Yes. [Laughter] I like that. Looking clean. Yes. Go ahead.

Higher Education Costs/Community Colleges

Q. My name is Brandon Pope, graduating senior here at Benedict College, majoring in business management.

The President. Excellent.

Q. My question is, tuition is very high in the United States—

The President. Can I make it lower? [Laughter] Is that the question? [Laughter]

Q. —while in other countries, it's free. What are some of your plans to assist those that are having trouble paying for school?

The President. Well, let me—first of all, let me just say, this is a cause near and dear to my heart because Michelle and I, we weren't born into wealthy families, so the only way we got our education was because we got help: loans, grants, work-study programs. If we hadn't had that available to us, we could not have pursued the education we did and couldn't have achieved what we achieved.

And even with all the help we got, we had so much debt when we got married that we had negative liabilities—[laughter]—we just joined our—together our negative liabilities. And it took us, like, 10 years to pay off our debt. For the first 10 years of our marriage, our loans were more expensive than our mortgage. It was only about 2 years or 3 years before I was elected a U.S. Senator that I paid off my loans.

Now, the truth is that, historically, the reason America succeeded so well is, we've always been ahead of the curve in educating our population. We were the first country to say, let's have free public high schools. When folks who had fought in World War II came back, gave them a GI bill. Middle class helped to get built because people got new skills. And through much of the sixties and the seventies and the eighties, our public university system was hugely important in giving people a pathway into the middle class.

Now, here's what happened. Typically, State legislatures started cutting support for State universities. Those State universities and colleges then decided, well, we're going to have to jack up tuition to make up for the money that we've lost because the State is not giving us as much. And that's how tuition started to get higher and higher and higher.

Now, what I've done since I became President was a couple things. We significantly expanded the Pell grant program, with the help of people like Jim Clyburn. It used to be that the student loan program was run through the banks and the banks would take a cut. They were making billions of dollars on student loans. We said, why do we have to go through the banks? Let's just give it directly to the students, save that money, and give it to more students and increase the size of the Pell grant.

And we initiated a program that many of you can still take advantage of, and that is, we capped the percentage of your income that you have to pay in repaying your student loans so that if you decide to become a teacher or you decide to become a social worker, you get a job just starting off that's not paying you a lot of money, but is in the field that you want, you don't have to say no because you can't afford it.

It's only going to be 10 percent of your income, so it makes your debt payments manageable.

But what we still have to do is—to deal with the question you pointed out—which is, how do we just keep tuition lower generally? Now, the big proposal that I put forward this year is, let's make community colleges free for those who are—[applause]. Now, it would be conditioned. You would have to keep up a certain GPA. You'd have to put in some sweat equity into the thing. But the point is, those first 2 years were free. The advantage of that is, first of all, a lot of young people start at community colleges, and they may not want a 4-year degree, but they can get a 2-year degree that gives them the skills they need to get a job and not have any debt.

Even if you want to go to a 4-year college, for a lot of young people, it may be a good option to go to a community college for the first four—2 years, then transfer your credits. And you've at least saved half of what you would otherwise spend on your 4-year degree. And we can do this just by closing some loopholes in the tax system that gives companies the ability to avoid paying the taxes that they're owed—they owe.

So far, at least, I haven't gotten the kind of support I'd like from some of my Republican friends in the Senate and House of Representatives. But we're going to keep on working on it because it's a smart idea. Look, I want ultimately—ultimately, I want at least the first 2 years of college to be just like public high schools are now. And everybody—because you—it is very hard nowadays to find a well-paying job without some form of higher education—without some form of higher education.

Even if you end up working in a factory these days—you go into a modern factory—it's all computerized, and you've got to know math, and you've got to be able to function in a high-tech environment. So it's a proposal whose time has come. We may not be able to convince Republicans to get it done this year, but we're going to just keep on going at this. Ultimately, this is what is going to keep America at the cutting edge. And if we're able to do that, then we're going to be able save you a little bit

of money, and you won't have the same kind of debt that I had to take out when I got my degree.

All right? Thank you for the question.

All right, it's a young lady's turn now. That young lady in the orange right there. It's hard to miss—[laughter]—got the yellow and the orange. Did you wear that just so I'd call on you? [Laughter]

Education/The President's Advice to Young People

Q. Just for you. Thank you for being here, President Obama. My name is Rania Jamison. I am a public relations consultant and a community organizer. I am, most proudly, the parent of two young Black males.

The President. There you go.

Q. Sit down for a moment because I have an 18-year-old and, yes, I have recently birthed a 1-year-old.

The President. Oh, oh. [Laughter] That's a big spread. [Laughter]

Q. Seventeen years.

The President. It took you that long to forget what it was like. [Laughter]

Q. I have a quick question for you, primarily about my 18-year-old. He is a scholarship student-athlete at South Carolina State University. I'm very proud of the fact that he is there. But as I'm sure you are aware, HBCUs—in particular, South Carolina State University is facing a bit of an uphill battle at this moment. I have a question for you for students like him that are there, others across the world that are facing situations that are insurmountable and challenging: How do you stay motivated, and what particular advice do you have for me to take back to Lenard, to tell him to stay encouraged, continue to keep the hope alive, and do his best? Thank you.

The President. Well, I mean, the main thing you should tell him is listen to your mom. [Laughter] I hope you recorded that. So—you did? Look, I'm trying to remember what it was like being 18 and 19 and 20. It's been a while. But the one thing that I always say to young people coming up these days is, you should be

wildly optimistic about your possibilities in your future.

So often, when we watch the nightly news or read the papers, all you're hearing about is bad stuff going on. It just seems like, man, there's war and strife, and folks are arguing and yelling, and conflict. But the truth is, is that today, right now, you are more likely to be healthier, wealthier, less discriminated against, have more opportunity, less likely to be caught up in violence than probably any time in human history.

The opportunities for you to get information and to get an education and expose yourself to the entire world because of technology is unmatched. It's never been like this before. Your ability to start your own business or carve your own path has never been greater. So my first and general point is do not get cynical about what's possible.

The second thing is, you've got to work really hard. And there's no free lunch, and you can't make excuses. In particular, when I'm talking to young African American men, sometimes, I think the sense is, cards are stacked against us, and discrimination is still out there, and so it's easy sometimes just to kind of pull back and say, well, you know, this is just too hard.

And this is part of why it's so important for us to remember Selma tomorrow. It's not as hard as it was 50 years ago. It's not as hard as it was when Jim Clyburn was coming up, and he's now one of the most powerful men in the country, growing up right here in South Carolina.

So there are no excuses not to put in the effort. There are no excuses not to hit the books. If you want a good education in this country, you can get a good education, even if you are in a bad school. And I'll be honest with you, we've got to do some work to make schools more equal. Right here in South Carolina, there are still schools that were built back in the 1800s that haven't been repaired and don't have decent restrooms and don't have proper books.

So we've still got to fight to make sure that every child, not just some, have equal opportunity. That's a worthy fight. But you can still learn even in that school. Even in the most

rundown school, if you're putting in the effort, you can get a good education. So you can't make excuses. Even as you advocate for justice, you've got to make sure that you're also taking advantage of the opportunities that you currently have.

But that brings me to one last piece of advice for young people, and that is, think about more than just yourself. Think about how you can have an impact beyond yourself. The people who I know who are really happy and successful as they get older, it's because they have an impact on something other than just their own situation. They're not just thinking about, how do I get mine? They're thinking about, how does everybody get their fair share? And when they do that, that gives meaning to your life, that gives purpose to your life, that gives you influence and a sense of purpose.

And you've got to have a sense of purpose beyond just the almighty dollar. I mean, look, I am—we live in a free market society, and one of the things that sets America apart is business and entrepreneurship and hustle, and some—folks are out there just, they're trying to make a new product or create a new service, and the profit motive is strong. And that's good. That's important. But if that's all you're thinking about, and you're not thinking about how you can also have an impact through your church, or if you're not thinking about how you can treat your employees right when you do get a business, if you're not thinking, once you do make it, what am I giving back to make sure that I'm giving a helping hand to the folks coming up behind me—if you're not thinking that way, you won't be able to get through the tough times. What gets you through tough times is that sense of purpose. And that purpose cannot just be about yourself, it's got to be about something larger.

So all right. Oh, we've got a young man right here. He's standing tall. Go ahead. Yes, sir.

Education

Q. My name is Trace Adams.

The President. Hey, Trace. How old are you, man?

Q. Ten.

The President. So you're in fifth grade?

Q. Fourth.

The President. Fourth grade? You're a tall guy.

Q. Thank you.

The President. So what's going on, Trace?

Q. I was just wondering—I'm 10, and I was just wondering when you were interested in being a President.

The President. Well, I wasn't—it wasn't when I was 10. Are you thinking about it? [*Laughter*]

Q. A little bit, yes, sir. [*Laughter*]

The President. Okay. All right. I mean, you're definitely ahead of me. The—now, just remember, you got to wait until you're 35. That's in the Constitution. So you've got at least 25 years to prepare.

I did not think about—when I was 10, I wasn't thinking about being President. I think when I was 10, I was interested in being an architect. I was interested in the idea of, like, building buildings, and I thought that was pretty cool. And then, I went through a bunch of stuff, and for a while, I thought I might be a basketball player, and it turned out, I was too slow and I couldn't jump. [*Laughter*] And so I stopped thinking that. And then I became interested in being a lawyer, and I did become a lawyer.

But what are you interested in right now? What subjects are you interested in school?

Q. Social studies, actually.

The President. Social studies? So you're interested in public policy. Are you starting to read the newspapers and things? Do you discuss—is that your dad behind you?

Q. That's me.

Q. Yes, sir.

The President. And you discuss the issues with your dad and stuff?

Q. Oh, yes, sir, definitely.

The President. Oh, yes, I can tell you do. [*Laughter*] Okay.

Well, I think the most important thing is to just make sure that you work hard in school. I think it's really good if you get involved in, like, some service projects and help out people in your community, whether it's through the Scouts or your church or at school or some

other program, so that you get used to trying to help other people.

Make sure you graduate from college. And then, who knows, you might end up being—I might just be warming up the seat for you. [Laughter] And if you become President, I want you to remind everybody how, when you talked to President Obama, he said, go for it. All right? Don't forget me. [Laughter]

All right. That's Trey—Trey, who's 10 years old and already thinking—he's already thinking about public policy. I just want all the folks in college to just notice, he's reading the papers and talking public policy. [Laughter] So if all you're doing is watching the ballgame—don't let 10-year-old Trey embarrass you now. [Laughter]

All right, it's a young lady's turn. Well, it's not going to help you just to be all, like—you've got, like, five people all helping you out. I'll call on one of the young ladies there who's part of City Year. They're wearing the City—did you do paper, scissor, stone? Is that what happened? [Laughter] All right. You all did that fast too. It's like you guys do that for everything. Where are we going to lunch? [Laughter]

Q. Well, good afternoon, Mr. President. My name is Tarissa Young Clayborn. I am also a native of Illinois, so it's good to see you here. I am also a proud City Year AmeriCorps member at Hyde Park Elementary School here in Columbia.

The President. There you go. Fantastic. So there's a Hyde Park school here?

Q. Yes, sir.

The President. Because there's a Hyde Park in Chicago back home.

Q. Yes, there is a Hyde Park in Chicago. So my question for you—

The President. Look, he's like, "Hey-ay." [Laughter].

AmeriCorps/"My Brother's Keeper" Initiative/Criminal Justice Reform Efforts

Q. My question for you, Mr. President: How can City Year and other AmeriCorps programs support the goals of "My Brother's Keeper"?

The President. Well, first of all, City Year, AmeriCorps—for those young people who are thinking about public service or want to serve

before they go on to graduate school or, in some cases, want to get involved before they go to college, AmeriCorps programs are an outstanding way to help fund your college education.

And City Year is one of the great AmeriCorps programs that we have. In addition to them all getting these spiffy red jackets, they end up being placed in communities all across the country doing—working in schools, working in communities in need, working on housing programs, all kinds of different stuff. And we're very proud of them.

"My Brother's Keepers"—the idea, the genesis of this came after the Trayvon Martin verdict, and obviously, there was great controversy about how the case was handled. And Eric Holder, by the way, has done an outstanding job getting our Justice Department to stay focused on the equal application of the law at local and State, as well as Federal levels.

But what I realized is, also, part of the goal of making sure that young African American men succeed, young Latino men succeed, young White men who don't have opportunity succeed, is to make sure that everybody has got a path that leads in a positive direction. And you can't wait until somebody is in trouble before you start intervening. You've got to start when they're younger.

You've got to—because the statistics show that if a child, by the time they're in third grade, is reading at grade level, they are far more likely to be able to graduate and succeed. If a child doesn't get suspended or disciplined in school, they're far less likely to get involved in the criminal justice system. If they get through high school without being involved in the criminal justice system, they are far less likely then to ever get involved in the criminal justice system.

So there are these points where we know that if you intervene in a timely way, it will make a difference. So what we've done is to get pledges from foundations and philanthropies. We've recruited businesses. We've gotten the NBA involved. We've gotten every agency in our Government involved. And we've gotten cities—and your mayor is participating in this,

so Columbia is participating in this—in coming up with local plans for how are we going to give opportunities, pathways for mentorship, apprenticeship, afterschool programs, job search, college prep, you name it. And each community is coming up with its own programs and plans, and then, we are partnering with them and helping match them up with folks in their area who are also interested in resourcing these initiatives.

And AmeriCorps, I think, is a key part of this because where a city or a State or a local community has a good plan, there is an opportunity for City Year or any other AmeriCorps program to be plugged in to that plan and become part of that plan. And my hope is, is that over the next several years and beyond my Presidency, because I'll stay involved in this, that in every city around the country, we start providing the kinds of help that is needed to make sure our young men are on the right track.

Now, I want to point out, by the way, I'm not neglecting young women, because, as you might expect, Michelle would not let me. [Laughter] So she has initiated programs for mentorships. And we've got an entire office in the White House for women and girls, that's focused on some of these same initiatives. But there is a particular challenge that we face for African American and Latino men, young men of color. And we've got to be honest about that. We're losing a large portion of our generation—or a big chunk of this generation and the previous generation.

I was talking to my—we have something called the Council of Economic Advisers. And even though there's been good job growth, really strong job growth, and unemployment has come down, we've gotten through the recession, the labor participation rate, the number of people who are actively seeking work, still is low compared to what it was 10 years ago. And we're asking ourselves why.

Now, part of it is, the population is getting older, so more people are retiring and not working. But that's not the only reason. In the African American community, a big reason is that you've got young people with criminal re-

ords who are finding themselves unemployable.

Now, that's not just bad for that individual, that's bad for their children, that's bad for the community. So this is part of the reason why it's so important for us to rethink how we approach nonviolent drug offenses, which is responsible for a lot of the churn of young men of color going through the criminal justice system. We've got to reexamining—reexamine how sentencing is working—and make sure it's done equally, by the way, because we know, statistically, it's been demonstrated that African American men are more likely to be arrested than their counterparts, more likely to be searched, more likely to be prosecuted, and more likely to get stiffer sentences despite the fact that they are no more likely to use drugs or deal drugs than the general population. And that's a problem.

So we're going to have to look at reforms there. But for those who are already in the pipeline, we've also got to think about, how do we help them get the kind of help that they need? And this is going to be something that I'm devoting a lot of energy to because this is not just a Black or Hispanic problem, this is an American problem. If you've got a big chunk of your workforce that is not working, and that's the youngest part of our—your workforce, and they're never contributing to the economy and not paying taxes and not supporting Social Security, then the whole economy grows slower. Everybody is worse off.

So this is not an issue just for one group. This is an issue for everybody. All right?

All right. [Laughter] All right. It's a young woman's turn. It's a young woman's turn. I'll be happy to sign your book. I know, you've been waving a lot, but it's not going to help. [Laughter] It's a young woman's turn. So let's see, this young lady way back in the back, right up there. Yes. I'm going to give—make the mike person get some exercise.

Presidential Pardons/White House Fellowship Program

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Good afternoon, and welcome to South Carolina. My

name is Simone Martin. I'm an attorney in this area with the Rutherford law firm. In fact, my boss, Representative and House Minority Leader Todd Rutherford, is sitting right over there—probably wondering why I'm not at the office. [Laughter] But nevertheless—

The President. Are you advertising for him? Was this, like, a whole—[laughter].

Q. No, I'm just trying to keep my job.

The President. Are you going to give, like, the number?

Q. No, I'm just trying to keep my job.

The President. “If you need representation”—[laughter]—“call Rutherford and Associates.” [Laughter]

Q. Yes.

The President. All right, go ahead.

Q. I have two questions for you. I hope that you'll indulge me by addressing both. They're quick—or the second one is quick. The first one is, what can criminal defense attorneys, like myself and Mr. Rutherford, do to increase the number of Federal pardons that are granted? The second question is, to whom do I need to speak to improve my chances of being selected as a White House fellow? Can you help me out? [Laughter]

The President. Oh, okay. So the—well, let me address the non-self-interested question first. [Laughter] I just had a discussion about the criminal justice system. One of the extraordinary powers that a President has is the power to commute sentences or to pardon somebody who's already been sentenced. And when I came into office, for the first couple of years, I noticed that I wasn't really getting a lot of recommendations for pardons that I—at least not as many as I would expect. And many of them were from older folks. A lot of them were people just looking for a pardon so they could restore their gun rights. But sort of the more typical cases that I would have expected weren't coming up.

So I asked Attorney General Holder to work with me to set up a new office, or at least a new approach, inside the Justice Department. Because historically, what happened was the President would get a big stack of recommendations and then he could sign off on them—

because obviously, I don't have time to go through each request. And so what we've done now is opened it up so that people are more aware of the process. And what you can do is contact the Justice Department. But essentially, we're now working with the NAACP, we're working with various public defenders' offices and community organizations just to make people aware that this is a process that you can go through.

Now, typically, we have a pretty strict set of criteria for whether we would even consider you for a pardon or a commutation.

Eric, I assume that that's available somewhere on the Justice Department website, is that correct?

Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr. Yes.

The President. Okay. So my first suggestion would be to go to the Justice Department website. If you—if the person doesn't qualify because they may have served time, but there were problems when they served time, or if it was a particularly violent crime, or they may just not fit the criteria where we would consider it—a lot of what we're focused on is nonviolent drug offenses where somebody might have gotten 25 years, and she was the girlfriend of somebody and somehow got caught up, and since then has led an exemplary life, but now really wants to be able to start a new career or something like that. That's the kind of person, typically, that would get through the process.

Now, in terms of the White House Fellows program, there's a whole White House Fellows committee, and it's complicated, and I don't have any pull on it. [Laughter] I do not put my thumb on the scale, because if I did, I'd get into trouble. Because then, people would say, he just put his friends on there. So you've got to go through the process. But you seem very well qualified, so good luck.

Q. Thank you. It was an honor.

The President. You're welcome. All right.

How many more questions do I got? I like to—it looks like I'm okay. All right, you know what, I'm going to just call on this gentleman. He's been, like, waving, and I've got to make sure he's not waving. Because out of his pe-

riphery I just saw him the whole time. All right. Let's make sure this question—go ahead.

Department of Justice Reports on the Shooting of Michael Brown and Police Department Practices in Ferguson, Missouri/Law Enforcement Reform Efforts

Q. First, I have two questions. Firstly, would you sign my book?

The President. Yes, I will sign your book.

Q. All right. And I'm a student currently studying at the University of South Carolina.

The President. Okay. Go Gamecocks! [*Laughter*]

Q. I see President Pastides is in the house, so it's good to see you, Mr. President.

The President. You're sucking up to the president, huh? [*Laughter*]

Q. My question, well, I guess it relates to the Michael Brown case. And I've just recently seen the report that suggested that there's been grave injustices going on in Ferguson. And I'm trying to figure out why the Attorney General, Eric Holder, refused to press charges against the police officer. Why didn't he face the Federal charges?

The President. Well, I will answer that question.

Q. And—

The President. Now, that was two questions right now.

Q. And I'm trying—

The President. No, that's it. [*Laughter*] You don't get a third question. Sit down. I called on you. Come on, sit down. [*Laughter*] See, this is how folks will get you. My reporter friends here, they're famous for doing that. They'll be, like, Mr. President, I've got a four-part question. [*Laughter*] So you only get two. I will sign your book.

With respect to Ferguson, keep in mind that there are two separate issues involved. The first is the specific case of Officer Wilson and Michael Brown. And that is typically a charge that would be brought and dealt with at the State level, the local level. The Federal Government has a role only if it can show that there was a significant miscarriage of the justice system and had clear evidence—now, I'm

not being overly technical, but basically, the Federal jurisdiction here is to make sure that this wasn't just a completely wrong decision.

They don't retry the whole thing all over again. They look to see whether or not, at the State level, due process and the investigation was conducted. And the standard for overturning that or essentially coming in on top of the State decision is very high. The finding that was made was that it was not unreasonable to determine that there was not sufficient evidence to charge Officer Wilson.

Now, that was an objective, thorough, independent, Federal investigation. We may never know exactly what happened, but Officer Wilson, like anybody else who is charged with a crime, benefits from due process and a reasonable doubt standard. And if there is uncertainty about what happened, then you can't just charge him anyway just because what happened was tragic. That was the decision that was made. And I have complete confidence and stand fully behind the decision that was made by the Justice Department on that issue.

There is a second aspect to this, which is, how does the Ferguson Police Department and the government of Ferguson, the municipality, treat its African American citizens when it comes to law enforcement? And there, the finding was very clear, and it's available for everybody to read.

What we saw was that the Ferguson Police Department, in conjunction with the municipality, saw traffic stops, arrests, tickets as a revenue generator as opposed to serving the community, and that it systematically was biased against African Americans in that city who were stopped, harassed, mistreated, abused, called names, fined. And then, the—it was structured so that they would get caught up in paying more and more fines that they couldn't afford to pay or were made difficult for them to pay, which raised the amount of additional money that they had to pay. And it was an oppressive and abusive situation. And that is also the conclusion that the Justice Department arrived at.

The steps that now are to be taken is that the Justice Department has presented this

evidence to the City of Ferguson, and the City of Ferguson has a choice to make. They're basically going to have to decide, do they dispute the findings of the Justice Department—and I shouldn't comment on that aspect of it, although I will say that what's striking about the report is a lot of this was just using e-mails from the officials themselves. So it wasn't like folks were just making it up. But the City of Ferguson will now have to make a decision: Are they going to enter into some sort of agreement with the Justice Department to fix what is clearly a broken and racially biased system? Or if they don't, then the Justice Department has the capacity to sue the city for violations of the rights of the people of Ferguson.

And I—here's the thing that—here's the lesson that I would draw from this. I don't think that what happens in Ferguson is typical. I think that the overwhelming majority of law enforcement officers here in South Carolina and anyplace else—young man, sit down, I'm in the middle of talking. All right, thank you. The overwhelming number of law enforcement officers have a really hard, dangerous job, and they do it well, and they do it fairly, and they do it heroically. And I strongly believe that. And the overwhelming majority of law—police departments across the country are really thinking hard about, how do we make sure that we are protecting and serving everybody equally?

And we need to honor those folks, and we need to respect them, and not just assume that they've got ill will or they're doing a bad job.

But as is true in any part of our lives—as is true among politicians, as is true among business leaders, as is true among anybody—there are circumstances in which folks don't do a good job, or worse, are doing things that are really unlawful or unjust or unfair.

And what happened in Ferguson is not a complete aberration. It's not just a one-time thing. It's something that happens. And one of the things that I think frustrated the people of Ferguson, in addition to the specific case of Michael Brown, was this sense of, you know what, we've been putting up for this for years, and now when we start talking about it, every-

body is pretending like it's just our imaginations, like we're just paranoid, we're just making this stuff up. And it turns out, they weren't just making it up. This was happening.

And so it's important for all of us then to figure out how do we move together to fix it. How do people of good will in law enforcement, in the community, everybody work to fix it and find concrete solutions, and to have accountability and oversight and transparency in terms of how law enforcement works?

And one of the great things that we did out of a tragic situation was, we were able to form a Task Force made up of law enforcement, police chiefs and community activists, including two of the activists who got the Ferguson marches and protests started. And they came up with a consensus document that was presented to me last week that was very specific in terms of how we can solve some of these problems: How we can make sure that police departments provide data about who they're stopping in traffic and data about how many people are killed in confrontations with the police, and how are those cases handled? And how are we training our law enforcement to respect the communities that they're serving? And how do we make sure we've got a diverse police force? And how do we look at new technologies like body cameras that may be helpful in this process? And how do we make sure that when something happens that may be an unjustified shoot, that people have confidence that the prosecutors are independent and there's a legitimacy to the process that they can trust.

That's good not just for the community, that's also good for the police department, so that they feel like they can get out from under a cloud if in fact the officer did the right thing. And if the officer did the wrong thing, that department should want to get rid of that officer, because they're going to undermine trust for the good cops that are out there doing a good job.

So the point is that now our task is to work together to solve the problem and not get caught up in either the cynicism that says this is never going to change because everybody is

racist—that’s not a good solution. That’s not what the folks in Selma did. They had confidence that they could change things and change people’s hearts and minds. So you’ve got to have the ability to assume the best in people, including law enforcement, and work with them.

And the flipside is, the larger community has to be able to say, you know what, when a community says systematically that it’s having some problems with its law enforcement, you’ve got to listen and pay attention and engage constructively to build trust and accountability so that it gets better.

So often we get caught up in this, and it becomes just a political football instead of us trying to solve the problem. And our goal should be to stop circumstances such as Ferguson or what happened in New York from happening again. That should be our number-one goal. And it is achievable, but we’ve got to be constructive in going forward.

All right. I’ve got one more question. Now, it’s a woman’s turn. Men, all put down—men got to put down their hands now. I’m looking around. It’s not going to be a guy. Well, everybody, all right, we’ll call on this young lady right here. [Laughter] Oh, I’m sorry. Go ahead.

Q. I am also a native of Chicago.

The President. Oh, well, I—now, I did not mean to call on three Chicagoans. [Laughter] I guess this is where everybody in Chicago moves to because it’s too cold in Chicago. [Laughter] Go ahead.

Community-Oriented Policing/Gun Violence/Gun Control

Q. I am a senior majoring in psychology. One of my questions is, as you know, Chicago struggles with gun violence. So my question is, how—what organizations and programs are you guys designing to keep the youth off the streets and into better conditions? And how can we as a community help you guys execute those programs and designs and organizations?

The President. Well, I already mentioned “My Brother’s Keepers,” which is a major focus. Each community then is going to have its

own—this is an example of where you got to work with the police department effectively and build trust. What we know is, things like community policing really work, where you’re partnering with law enforcement; law enforcement gets to know young people when they’re still in school before they’re in trouble. People have confidence that law enforcement is there for them, not just in tamping down stuff, but to—in lifting people up. “My Brother’s Keeper” and other initiatives are going to make a big difference in giving young people an opportunity.

Now, you mentioned gun violence, and that’s probably the hardest issue to deal with. We have a long tradition of gun rights and gun ownership in this country. The Second Amendment has been interpreted by the Supreme Court to mean that people have the right to bear arms. There are a lot of law-abiding, responsible gun owners who use it for protection or sport. They handle their weapons properly. There are traditions of families passing down from father to son or daughter, you know, hunting. And that’s important. That’s part of our culture. That’s part of who we are.

But what we also have to recognize is, is that our homicide rates are so much higher than other industrialized countries. I mean, by, like, a mile. And most of that is attributable to the easy, ready availability of firearms, particularly handguns.

Now, the courts and State legislatures—and I’m sure this is true in South Carolina—have greatly restricted the ability to put in place commonsense—some commonsense gun safety laws like background checks. I personally believe that it is not violating anybody’s rights that if you want to purchase a gun, it should be at least your responsibility to get a background check so that we know you were not a violent felon or that you don’t currently have a restraining order on you because you committed domestic abuse or—right now we don’t know a lot of that. It’s just not available. And that’s—that doesn’t make sense to me. And I’ll be honest with you, I thought after what happened at Sandy Hook, that that would make us think about it.

The hardest day of my Presidency, and I've had some hard days, but nothing compares to being with the parents of 20 6-year-old kids, beautiful little kids, and some heroic teachers and administrators in that school, just 2, 3 days after they had been just gunned down in their own classroom. And you would have thought at that point, that has got to be enough of a motivator for us to want to do something about this. And we couldn't get it done. I mean, there was just—at least at the congressional level.

So what we've done is, we have tried as much as we can administratively to implement background laws checks and to make sure that we're working with those States and cities and jurisdictions that are interested and willing to partner with us to crack down on the illegal use of firearms, particularly handguns.

But I'll be honest with you. In the absence of more what I would consider heroic and courageous stances from our legislators both at the State level and the Federal level, it is hard to reduce the easy availability of guns. And as long as there—as long as you can go on—into some neighborhoods and it is easier for you to buy a firearm than it is for you to buy a book—there are neighborhoods where it's easier for you to buy a handgun and clips than it is for you to buy a fresh vegetable—as long as that's the case, we're going to continue to see unnecessary violence.

But I guess I'll end by saying this. Despite those frustrations, despite the failure of Congress to act, despite the failure of too many State legislators to act—in fact, in some places it goes the opposite direction, people just say well, we should have firearms in kindergarten and we should have machine guns in bars. You

think I'm exaggerating—I mean, you look at some of these laws that come up.

Despite those frustrations, I would say it is still within our control to reduce the incidence of handgun violence by making sure that our young people understand that that is not a sign of strength, that violence is not the answer for whatever frustrations they may have or conflicts they may have, and work diligently with our young people and in our communities to try to put them on a positive path.

And the people who are going to lead that process are the young people who are here today. You are going to have more impact on the young people coming up behind you than anybody else. And the kind of example you set and the willingness of all of you to get involved and engaged in a concrete way, to remake our world together, that's what's going to determine the future of America. And looking out at all of you, you're what makes me optimistic.

Thank you very much, Benedict College. Appreciate you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:10 p.m. in the Benjamin E. Mays Human Resources Center. In his remarks, he referred to Tiana Cox, student, Benedict College; Mayor Terrence D. Culbreath of Johnston, SC; Mayor William Johnson of Holly Hill, SC; Harris Pastides, president, University of South Carolina; Darren Wilson, officer, Ferguson, MO, Police Department; and Brittany Packnett, executive director, Teach For America St. Louis, and Rashawn Aldridge, Jr., director, Young Activists United St. Louis, in their capacity as members of the President's Task Force on 21st-Century Policing.

The President's Weekly Address

March 7, 2015

Hi, everybody. Sunday is International Women's Day, a day to celebrate remarkable women and girls worldwide and to rededicate ourselves to defending the fundamental rights and dignity of all people.

That's why, this week, Michelle and I launched a new initiative on a topic that's close

to both our hearts: girls' education. It's called "Let Girls Learn," and its goal is to help more girls around the world go to school and stay in school. Right now 62 million girls who should be in school are not. And that's not an accident. It's the direct result of barriers, large and small, that stand in the way of girls who want to learn.

Maybe their families can't afford the school fees. Maybe the risk of being hurt or kidnapped or even killed by men who will do anything to stop girls from learning is just too great. Or maybe they aren't in school because they're expected to get married and become mothers while they're still teenagers or even earlier. In too many parts of the world, girls are still valued more for their bodies than for their minds. That's just plain wrong. And we all have to do more to stop it.

That's the idea behind "Let Girls Learn." We're making it clear to any country that's our partner—or that wants to be our partner—that they need to get serious about increasing the number of girls in school. Our diplomats and development experts are already hard at work. Our Peace Corps volunteers will play a big role too. And we're putting our partnerships with NGOs, businesses, and foundations to work on behalf of girls everywhere.

I come to this issue as the leader of the world's largest economy and Commander in Chief of the world's most powerful military, and I am convinced that a world in which girls are educated is a safer, more stable, more prosperous place. When girls are educated, their future children are healthier and better nour-

ished. Their future wages increase, which in turn strengthens their families' security. National economic growth gets a boost too. And places where women and girls are treated as full and equal citizens tend to be more stable and more democratic.

I also come to this issue as the father of two wonderful young women. And I know that there are lots of girls just like Malia and Sasha out there, girls who are funny and caring and inquisitive and strong and have so much to offer the world.

It's a privilege to be the parent of girls. And we want to make sure that no girl out there is denied her chance to learn, that no girl is prevented from making her unique contributions to the world. Because every girl—every girl—deserves our respect. And every girl deserves an education.

Thanks, and have a great weekend.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 1:55 p.m. on March 6 in Room 131 of the Benjamin E. Mays Human Resources Center at Benedict College in Columbia, SC, for broadcast on March 7. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 6, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on March 7.

Remarks Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Selma-to-Montgomery Marches for Voting Rights in Selma, Alabama March 7, 2015

Audience member. We love you, President Obama!

The President. Well, you know I love you back.

It is a rare honor in this life to follow one of your heroes. And John Lewis is one of my heroes.

Now, I have to imagine that when a younger John Lewis woke up that morning 50 years ago and made his way to Brown Chapel, heroics were not on his mind. A day like this was not on his mind. Young folks with bedrolls and backpacks were milling about. Veterans of the movement trained newcomers in the tactics of nonviolence, the right way to protect yourself

when attacked. A doctor described what tear gas does to the body, while marchers scribbled down instructions for contacting their loved ones. The air was thick with doubt, anticipation, and fear. And they comforted themselves with the final verse of the final hymn they sung: "No matter what may be the test, God will take care of you; Lean, weary one, upon His breast, God will take care of you."

And then, his knapsack stocked with an apple, a toothbrush, and a book on government—all you need for a night behind bars—John Lewis led them out of the church on a mission to change America.

President and Mrs. Bush, Governor Bentley, Mayor Evans, Congresswoman Sewell, Reverend Strong, Members of Congress, elected officials, foot soldiers, friends, fellow Americans: As John noted, there are places and moments in America where this Nation's destiny has been decided. Many are sites of war: Concord and Lexington, Appomattox, Gettysburg. Others are sites that symbolize the daring of America's character: Independence Hall and Seneca Falls, Kitty Hawk and Cape Canaveral.

Selma is such a place. In one afternoon 50 years ago, so much of our turbulent history—the stain of slavery and anguish of civil war, the yoke of segregation and tyranny of Jim Crow, the death of four little girls in Birmingham, and the dream of a Baptist preacher—all that history met on this bridge.

It was not a clash of armies, but a clash of wills; a contest to determine the true meaning of America. And because of men and women like John Lewis, Joseph Lowery, Hosea Williams, Amelia Boynton, Diane Nash, Ralph Abernathy, C.T. Vivian, Andrew Young, Fred Shuttlesworth, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., so many others, the idea of a just America and a fair America, an inclusive America and a generous America—that idea ultimately triumphed.

Now, as is true across the landscape of American history, we cannot examine this moment in isolation. The march on Selma was part of a broader campaign that spanned generations, the leaders that day part of a long line of heroes.

We gather here to celebrate them. We gather here to honor the courage of ordinary Americans willing to endure billy clubs and the chastening rod, tear gas and the trampling hoof; men and women who despite the gush of blood and splintered bone would stay true to their north star and keep marching towards justice.

They did as Scripture instructed: "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer." And in the days to come, they went back again and again. When the trumpet call sounded for more to join, the people came: Black and White, young and old, Christian and Jew, waving the American flag, singing the

same anthems full of faith and hope. A White newsman, Bill Plante, who covered the marches then and who is with us here today, quipped that the growing number of White people lowered the quality of the singing. [Laughter] To those who marched, though, those old gospel songs must have never sounded so sweet.

In time, their chorus would well up and reach President Johnson. And he would send them protection and speak to the Nation, echoing their call for America and the world to hear: "We shall overcome." What enormous faith these men and women had: faith in God, but also faith in America.

The Americans who crossed this bridge, they were not physically imposing, but they gave courage to millions. They held no elected office, but they led a nation. They marched as Americans who had endured hundreds of years of brutal violence, countless daily indignities. But they didn't seek special treatment, just the equal treatment promised to them almost a century before.

What they did here will reverberate through the ages. Not because the change they won was preordained, not because their victory was complete, but because they proved that nonviolent change is possible, that love and hope can conquer hate.

As we commemorate their achievement, we are well served to remember that, at the time of the marches, many in power condemned rather than praised them. Back then, they were called Communists or half-breeds or outside agitators, sexual and moral degenerates, and worse. They were called everything but the name their parents gave them. Their faith was questioned, their lives were threatened, their patriotism challenged.

And yet what could be more American than what happened in this place? What could more profoundly vindicate the idea of America than plain and humble people—unsung, the downtrodden, the dreamers not of high station, not born to wealth or privilege, not of one religious tradition but many—coming together to shape their country's course?

What greater expression of faith in the American experiment than this? What greater

form of patriotism is there than the belief that America is not yet finished, that we are strong enough to be self-critical, that each successive generation can look upon our imperfections and decide that it is in our power to remake this Nation to more closely align with our highest ideals?

That's why their Selma is not some outlier in the American experience. That's why it's not a museum or a static monument to behold from a distance. It is instead the manifestation of a creed written into our founding documents: "We the People . . . in order to form a more perfect Union." "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

These are not just words. They're a living thing, a call to action, a roadmap for citizenship, and an insistence in the capacity of free men and women to shape our own destiny. For Founders like Franklin and Jefferson, for leaders like Lincoln and FDR, the success of our experiment in self-government rested on engaging all of our citizens in this work. And that's what we celebrate here in Selma. That's what this movement was all about, one leg in our long journey toward freedom.

The American instinct that led these young men and women to pick up the torch and cross this bridge, that's the same instinct that moved patriots to choose revolution over tyranny. It's the same instinct that drew immigrants from across oceans and the Rio Grande; the same instinct that led women to reach for the ballot, workers to organize against an unjust status quo; the same instinct that led us to plant a flag at Iwo Jima and on the surface of the Moon.

It's the idea held by generations of citizens who believed that America is a constant work in progress, who believed that loving this country requires more than singing its praises or avoiding uncomfortable truths. It requires the occasional disruption, the willingness to speak out for what is right, to shake up the status quo. That's America.

That's what makes us unique. That's what cements our reputation as a beacon of opportunity. Young people behind the Iron Curtain would see Selma and eventually tear down that wall. Young people in Soweto would hear Bob-

by Kennedy talk about ripples of hope and eventually banish the scourge of apartheid. Young people in Burma went to prison rather than submit to military rule. They saw what John Lewis had done. From the streets of Tunis to the Maidan in Ukraine, this generation of young people can draw strength from this place, where the powerless could change the world's greatest power and push their leaders to expand the boundaries of freedom. They saw that idea made real right here in Selma, Alabama. They saw that idea manifest itself here in America.

Because of campaigns like this, a Voting Rights Act was passed. Political and economic and social barriers came down. And the change these men and women wrought is visible here today in the presence of African Americans who run boardrooms, who sit on the bench, who serve in elected office from small towns to big cities, from the Congressional Black Caucus all the way to the Oval Office.

Because of what they did, the doors of opportunity swung open not just for Black folks, but for every American. Women marched through those doors. Latinos marched through those doors. Asian Americans, gay Americans, Americans with disabilities—they all came through those doors. Their endeavors gave the entire South the chance to rise again, not by reasserting the past, but by transcending the past. What a glorious thing, Dr. King might say. And what a solemn debt we owe. Which leads us to ask, just how might we repay that debt?

First and foremost, we have to recognize that one day's commemoration, no matter how special, is not enough. If Selma taught us anything, it's that our work is never done. The American experiment in self-government gives work and purpose to each generation.

Selma teaches us as well that action requires that we shed our cynicism. For when it comes to the pursuit of justice, we can afford neither complacency nor despair. Just this week, I was asked whether I thought the Department of Justice's Ferguson report shows that, with respect to race, little has changed in this country. And I understood the question; the report's

narrative was sadly familiar. It evoked the kind of abuse and disregard for citizens that spawned the civil rights movement. But I rejected the notion that nothing's changed. What happened in Ferguson may not be unique, but it's no longer endemic. It's no longer sanctioned by law or by custom. And before the civil rights movement, it most surely was.

We do a disservice to the cause of justice by intimating that bias and discrimination are immutable, that racial division is inherent in America. If you think nothing's changed in the past 50 years, ask somebody who lived through the Selma or Chicago or Los Angeles of the 1950s. Ask the female CEO who once might have been assigned to the secretarial pool if nothing's changed. Ask your gay friend if it's easier to be out and proud in America now than it was 30 years ago. To deny this progress, this hard-won progress—our progress—would be to rob us of our own agency, our own capacity, our responsibility to do what we can to make America better.

Of course, a more common mistake is to suggest that Ferguson is an isolated incident, that racism is banished, that the work that drew men and women to Selma is now complete, and that whatever racial tensions remain are a consequence of those seeking to play the "race card" for their own purposes. We don't need a Ferguson report to know that's not true. We just need to open our eyes and our ears and our hearts to know that this Nation's racial history still casts its long shadow upon us.

We know the march is not yet over. We know the race is not yet won. We know that reaching that blessed destination where we are judged, all of us, by the content of our character requires admitting as much, facing up to the truth. "We are capable of bearing a great burden," James Baldwin once wrote, "once we discover that the burden is reality and arrive where reality is."

There's nothing America can't handle if we actually look squarely at the problem. And this is work for all Americans, not just some. Not just Whites. Not just Blacks. If we want to honor the courage of those who marched that day, then all of us are called to possess their moral

imagination. All of us will need to feel as they did the fierce urgency of now. All of us need to recognize as they did that change depends on our actions, on our attitudes, the things we teach our children. And if we make such an effort, no matter how hard it may sometimes seem, laws can be passed and consciences can be stirred and consensus can be built.

With such an effort, we can make sure our criminal justice system serves all and not just some. Together, we can raise the level of mutual trust that policing is built on: the idea that police officers are members of the community they risk their lives to protect. And citizens in Ferguson and New York and Cleveland, they just want the same thing young people here marched for 50 years ago: the protection of the law. Together, we can address unfair sentencing and overcrowded prisons and the stunted circumstances that rob too many boys of the chance to become men and rob the Nation of too many men who could be good dads and good workers and good neighbors.

With effort, we can roll back poverty and the roadblocks to opportunity. Americans don't accept a free ride for anybody, nor do we believe in equality of outcomes. But we do expect equal opportunity. And if we really mean it, if we're not just giving lip service to it, but if we really mean it and are willing to sacrifice for it, then, yes, we can make sure every child gets an education suitable to this new century, one that expands imaginations and lifts sights and gives those children the skills they need. We can make sure every person willing to work has the dignity of a job and a fair wage and a real voice and sturdier rungs on that ladder into the middle class.

And with effort, we can protect the foundation stone of our democracy for which so many marched across this bridge, and that is the right to vote. Right now, in 2015, 50 years after Selma, there are laws across this country designed to make it harder for people to vote. As we speak, more such laws are being proposed. Meanwhile, the Voting Rights Act, the culmination of so much blood, so much sweat and tears, the product of so much sacrifice in the face of wanton violence, the Voting Rights Act

stands weakened, its future subject to political rancor.

How can that be? The Voting Rights Act was one of the crowning achievements of our democracy, the result of Republican and Democratic efforts. President Reagan signed its renewal when he was in office. President George W. Bush signed its renewal when he was in office. One hundred Members of Congress have come here today to honor people who were willing to die for the right to protect it. If we want to honor this day, let that hundred go back to Washington and gather 400 more, and together, pledge to make it their mission to restore that law this year. That's how we honor those on this bridge.

Of course, our democracy is not the task of Congress alone or the courts alone or even the President alone. If every new voter suppression law was struck down today, we would still have, here in America, one of the lowest voting rates among free peoples. Fifty years ago, registering to vote here in Selma and much of the South meant guessing the number of jellybeans in a jar, the number of bubbles on a bar of soap. It meant risking your dignity and sometimes your life.

What's our excuse today for not voting? How do we so casually discard the right for which so many fought? How do we so fully give away our power, our voice, in shaping America's future? Why are we pointing to somebody else when we could take the time just to go to the polling places? We give away our power.

Fellow marchers, so much has changed in 50 years. We have endured war, and we've fashioned peace. We've seen technological wonders that touch every aspect of our lives. We take for granted conveniences that our parents could have scarcely imagined. But what has not changed is the imperative of citizenship, that willingness of a 26-year-old deacon or a Unitarian minister or a young mother of five to decide they loved this country so much that they'd risk everything to realize its promise. That's what it means to love America. That's what it means to believe in America. That's what it means when we say America is exceptional.

For we were born of change. We broke the old aristocracies, declaring ourselves entitled, not by bloodline, but endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights. We secure our rights and responsibilities through a system of self-government, of and by and for the people. That's why we argue and fight with so much passion and conviction, because we know our efforts matter. We know America is what we make of it.

Look at our history. We are Lewis and Clark and Sacajawea, pioneers who braved the unfamiliar, followed by a stampede of farmers and miners and entrepreneurs and hucksters. [Laughter] That's our spirit. That's who we are.

We are Sojourner Truth and Fannie Lou Hamer, women who could do as much as any man and then some. And we're Susan B. Anthony, who shook the system until the law reflected that truth. That is our character.

We're the immigrants who stowed away on ships to reach these shores, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free: Holocaust survivors, Soviet defectors, the Lost Boys of Sudan. We're the hopeful strivers who cross the Rio Grande because we want our kids to know a better life. That's how we came to be.

We're the slaves who built the White House and the economy of the South. We're the ranch hands and cowboys who opened up the West, the countless laborers who laid rail and raised skyscrapers and organized for workers' rights.

We're the fresh-faced GIs who fought to liberate a continent. And we're the Tuskegee Airmen and the Navajo Code Talkers and the Japanese Americans who fought for this country even as their own liberty had been denied.

We're the firefighters who rushed into those buildings on 9/11, the volunteers who signed up to fight in Afghanistan and Iraq. We're the gay Americans whose blood ran in the streets of San Francisco and New York, just as blood ran down this bridge.

We are storytellers, writers, poets, artists who abhor unfairness and despise hypocrisy and give voice to the voiceless and tell truths that need to be told.

We're the inventors of gospel and jazz and blues, bluegrass and country and hip-hop and rock and roll, and our very own sound with all the sweet sorrow and reckless joy of freedom.

We are Jackie Robinson, enduring scorn and spiked cleats and pitches coming straight to his head, and stealing home in the World Series anyway.

We are the people Langston Hughes wrote of who "build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how." We are the people Emerson wrote of, "who for truth and honor's sake stand fast and suffer long," who are "never tired, so long as we can see far enough."

That's what America is. Not stock photos or airbrushed history or feeble attempts to define some of us as more American than others. We respect the past, but we don't pine for the past. We don't fear the future, we grab for it. America is not some fragile thing. We are large, in the words of Whitman, containing multitudes. We are boisterous and diverse and full of energy, perpetually young in spirit. That's why someone like John Lewis at the ripe old age of 25 could lead a mighty march.

And that's what the young people here today and listening all across the country must take away from this day. You are America, unconstrained by habit and convention, unencumbered by what is, because you're ready to seize what ought to be.

For everywhere in this country, there are first steps to be taken, there's new ground to cover, there are more bridges to be crossed. And it is you, the young and fearless at heart, the most diverse and educated generation in our history, who the Nation is waiting to follow.

Because Selma shows us that America is not the project of any one person. Because the single most powerful word in our democracy is the word "we." "We the People." "We Shall Overcome." "Yes, We Can." That word is

owned by no one. It belongs to everyone. Oh, what a glorious task we are given, to continually try to improve this great Nation of ours.

Fifty years from Bloody Sunday, our march is not yet finished, but we're getting closer. Two hundred and thirty-nine years after this Nation's founding, our Union is not yet perfect, but we are getting closer. Our job's easier because somebody already got us through that first mile, somebody already got us over that bridge. When it feels the road is too hard, when the torch we've been passed feels too heavy, we will remember these early travelers and draw strength from their example and hold firmly to the words of the prophet Isaiah:

Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.

They will soar on the wings like eagles.

They will run and not grow weary.

They will walk and not be faint.

We honor those who walked so we could run. We must run so our children soar. And we will not grow weary, for we believe in the power of an awesome God and we believe in this country's sacred promise.

May He bless those warriors of justice no longer with us and bless the United States of America. Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:17 p.m. at the Edmund Pettus Bridge. In his remarks, he referred to former President George W. Bush and former First Lady Laura Bush; Leodis Strong, pastor, Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Selma, AL; civil rights activists Joseph E. Lowery, Amelia Boynton Robinson, Diane Nash, Cordy Tindell "C.T." Vivian, and Andrew J. Young; and Bill Plante, senior White House correspondent, CBS News.

Statement on International Women's Day

March 8, 2015

As half the planet, women make immeasurable contributions to our world. They are entrepreneurs, farmers, educators, scientists, art-

ists, soldiers, mothers, heads of state—the list is endless. Without them, economies would collapse, political systems would deteriorate,

and families and communities would fall apart. Yet in too many places, women are treated as second-class citizens, their abilities are undervalued, and their human rights—the right to learn, to express themselves, to live free from violence, to choose whether and whom to marry—are routinely violated.

This gap between women’s inherent value and how many of them are treated every day is one of the great injustices of our time. On this International Women’s Day, we recommit ourselves to closing that gap. That means supporting girls’ education. Right now 62 million girls worldwide who should be in school aren’t. Millions more are at risk of losing their access to

education. This week, Michelle and I announced an initiative called “Let Girls Learn” to help dismantle the barriers—economic, political, and cultural—that stand in the way of girls who want to learn.

I’m convinced that a world in which women and girls are treated as equal to men and boys is safer, more stable, and more prosperous. Beyond those tangible benefits, this is simply a matter of right and wrong. Women and girls are human beings, full and equal in rights and dignity. They deserve to be treated that way, everywhere, every day. My administration will continue working to make that vision a reality.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on Blocking Property and Suspending Entry of Certain Persons Contributing to the Situation in Venezuela March 8, 2015

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Mr. President:)

Pursuant to the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (50 U.S.C. 1701 *et seq.*) (IEEPA), I hereby report that I have issued an Executive Order (the “order”) declaring a national emergency with respect to the unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States posed by the situation in Venezuela. The order does not target the people of Venezuela, but rather is aimed at persons involved in or responsible for the erosion of human rights guarantees, persecution of political opponents, curtailment of press freedoms, use of violence and human rights violations and abuses in response to antigovernment protests, and arbitrary arrest and detention of antigovernment protestors, as well as the exacerbating presence of significant public corruption in that country. In addition to taking action under IEEPA, the order implements the Venezuela Defense of Human Rights and Civil Society Act of 2014 (Public Law 113–278) (the “Act”), which I signed on December 18, 2014, and delegates certain of its authorities.

The order blocks the property and interests in property of persons listed in an Annex to the

order and would block the property and interests in property of any person determined by the Secretary of the Treasury, in consultation with the Secretary of State:

- to be responsible for or complicit in, or responsible for ordering, controlling, or otherwise directing, or to have participated in, directly or indirectly, any of the following in or in relation to Venezuela:
- actions or policies that undermine democratic processes or institutions;
 - significant acts of violence or conduct that constitutes a serious abuse or violation of human rights, including against persons involved in antigovernment protests in Venezuela in or since February 2014;
 - actions that prohibit, limit, or penalize the exercise of freedom of expression or peaceful assembly; or
 - public corruption by senior officials within the Government of Venezuela;
- to be a current or former leader of an entity that has, or whose members have, engaged in any activity described in the order or of an entity whose property and

interests in property are blocked pursuant to the order;

- to be a current or former official of the Government of Venezuela;
- to have materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of:
 - a person whose property and interests in property are blocked pursuant to the order; or
 - an activity described in the order; or
- to be owned or controlled by, or to have acted or purported to act for or on behalf of, directly or indirectly, any person whose property and interests in property are blocked pursuant to the order.

In addition, the order suspends entry into the United States of any alien listed in the Annex or determined to meet one or more of the above criteria.

I have delegated to the Secretary of the Treasury the authority, in consultation with the Secretary of State, to take such actions, including the promulgation of rules and regulations, and to employ all powers granted to the President by IEEPA and relevant provisions of the

Act as may be necessary to carry out the purposes of the order, other than the provision suspending entry into the United States of certain aliens, and to carry out the related provisions of the Act. I have delegated to the Secretary of State the authority to take such actions, including the promulgation of rules and regulations, and to employ all powers granted to the President by IEEPA and relevant provisions of the Act as may be necessary to carry out the provision of the order and the Act suspending entry into the United States of certain aliens and the authority to issue waivers under the Act. All executive agencies are directed to take all appropriate measures within their authority to carry out the provisions of the order.

I am enclosing a copy of the Executive Order I have issued.

Sincerely,

BARACK OBAMA

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to John A. Boehner, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Joseph R. Biden, Jr., President of the Senate. The letter referred to Executive Order 13692, which is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume. The letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 9.

Remarks at the National League of Cities Congressional City Conference March 9, 2015

The President. Thank you! Hello, mayors! Everybody, have a seat. Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you, Mayor Becker, for the wonderful introduction and the great job that you are doing every single day. Everybody, have a seat. [Laughter] Sit down, take—

Audience member. I love you!

The President. I love you too.

It is great to be with the National League of Cities. We have about 2,000 local leaders here. We've got mayors, we've got councilmembers. We've got Republicans, Democrats, Independents.

Audience member. Independents—[inaudible].

The President. [Laughter] We've got some small-town leaders, we've got some bustling city leaders. But you all have something in common, and that is that every day you wake up ready to solve problems, and you know that people are depending on you to make sure your streets are safe, your schools are strong, trash gets picked up, roads getting cleared. You have to spend time thinking in very practical terms about whether people are getting good jobs and whether they're able to support a family.

So you don't have a lot of time for gridlock. You've got to get the job done. You don't have a lot of time for hot air. [Laughter] You—peo-

ple are expecting you to deliver. And you're part of the reason why America is coming back.

Last month, our economy created nearly 300,000 new jobs. Unemployment rate ticked down to 5.5 percent, which is the lowest it's been since the spring of 2008. And all told, businesses have now created over 12 million jobs over the last 5 years—12 million. And the good news is, the pace has been picking up. Our businesses have now added more than 200,000 jobs a month over the last year, and we have not seen a streak like that in almost 40 years.

So we're well positioned, we're in a good spot to take advantage of not just next year or the year after, but decades to come. And we've got to keep positioning ourselves for a constantly changing global economy. That's something all of you understand. It doesn't matter whether you're the mayor of a big city or a small town. You understand that the economy is dynamic now, and you can't just stand still, you can't rest on your laurels.

And you also understand we've got to stay focused on middle class economics, the notion that our country does best when everybody is getting a fair shot and everybody is doing their fair share and everybody is playing by the same set of rules. And I have to say, the National League of Cities has been a great partner in this work. A great partner.

We've worked with many of you to lift the minimum wage while we're waiting for Congress to do something. [Laughter] And over the past 2 years, more than 20 cities and counties have taken action to raise workers' wages. You've passed sick leave laws, you've answered the Mayors' Challenge To End Veterans Homelessness. Nearly 200 leaders have stepped up to answer what we're calling "My Brother's Keeper," the challenge to create more pathways to success for our young people. Some of you are supporting our efforts to secure new agreements for trade that's free and fair in some of the world's fastest growing markets, because you know that there are businesses, large and small, in your communities that can be impacted, and we want to make

sure our workers and our businesses can compete on a level playing field.

So there's a lot of work we've done together and a lot more we can do together to make sure that more Americans benefit from a 21st-century economy. And nobody knows for sure which industries are going to be generating all the good-paying jobs of the future. What we do know is we want them here in America, and we want them in your town, we want them in your cities, we want them in your counties. That's what we know.

So today I want to focus on something very specific, and that is, how can we work together to build a pipeline of tech workers for this new economy? Now, this doesn't just apply to San Francisco. This doesn't just apply to Boston. It applies across the board in every part of the country. Right now America has more job openings than at any point since 2001. So think of it—[applause]—that's good news, we've got a lot of job openings. Here's the catch: Over half a million of those jobs are technology jobs. A lot of those jobs didn't even exist 10, 20 years ago, titles like Mobile App Developer—[laughter]—or Userface Designer.

Now, we tend to think that all these tech jobs are in Silicon Valley, at companies like Google and eBay, or maybe in a few spots like Austin, Texas, where you've seen a tech industry thrive. But the truth is, two-thirds of these jobs are in non-high-tech industries like health care or manufacturing or banking, which means they're in every corner of the country.

See, there's no industry that hasn't been touched by this technology revolution. And what's more, a lot of these jobs don't require a 4-year degree in computer science, they don't require you be an engineer. Folks can get the skills they need for these jobs in newer, streamlined, faster training programs.

What's more, these tech jobs pay 50-percent more than the average private sector wage, which means they're a ticket into the middle class. And you all know better than anybody, this is an economic development issue, because when companies have job openings that they cannot fill, that costs them money. It costs them market share; it costs them exports. So

they go looking for where they can find the people they need. And if we don't have them, that makes it harder for us to keep and attract good jobs to our shores or to your communities.

When these jobs go unfilled, it's a missed opportunity for the workers, but it's also a missed opportunity for your city, your community, your county, your State, and our Nation. And here's something else: If we're not producing enough tech workers, over time that's going to threaten our leadership in global innovation, which is the bread and butter of the 21st-century economy.

America is where entrepreneurs come to start the greatest startups, where the most cutting-edge ideas are born and are launched. But historically, that's because we've got great universities, we've got great research, and we've got great workers. And if we lose those assets, they'll start drifting somewhere else, companies will get started somewhere else, and the great new industries of the future may not be here in America.

Now, I refuse to accept that future. I want Americans to win the race for the kinds of discoveries that release new jobs, whether it's converting sunlight into liquid fuel or leading a new era in personalized medicine or pushing out into the solar system, not just to visit, but to stay. We've got just this incredible set of opportunities, but we've got to have the workers for us to take advantage of it.

So today I'm announcing a new initiative that we're calling TechHire. TechHire. And it's going to be driven by leaders like you. So there are three big components to this.

First, we already have over 20 cities, States, and rural communities, from Louisville to Delaware, who have signed on to fill tech openings—they've already got more than 120,000 of them—in bold new ways. Let me give you an example. Employers tend to recruit people with technology degrees from 4-year colleges, and that means sometimes they end up screening out good candidates who don't necessarily have traditional qualifications; they may have learned at a community college, or they may

have served in our military. They've got the talent, but employers are missing them.

So TechHire communities are going to help employers link up and find and hire folks based on their actual skills and not just their résumés. It—because it turns out, it doesn't matter where you learned code, it just matters how good you are in writing code. If you can do the job, you should get the job.

And while 4-year degrees in engineering and computer science are still important, we have the opportunity to promote programs that we call, for example, coding boot camp, or online courses that have pioneered new ways to teach tech skills in a fraction of the time and the costs. And these new models have the potential to reach underserved communities: to reach women, who are still underrepresented in this sector; and minorities, who are still underrepresented in this sector; and veterans, who we know can do the job; and lower income workers, who might have the aptitude for tech jobs, but they don't know that these jobs are within reach.

Understand, within the tech sector, there are going to be tiers of jobs, all of which are tech, but they're not all the same. All right? There's still going to be the place—we still have to produce more engineers and advanced degrees in computer science at the upper tier, but there's all kinds of stuff that's being done within companies at different sectors that can create great careers for a long of people.

And so what TechHire is going to do is to help local leaders connect the job openings to the training programs to the jobs. And if you're not already involved in this, you've got to get involved, because your community needs this just like everybody else does. So that's the first component.

Second thing we're doing: We've got private-sector leaders who are supporting everything from scholarships to job-matching tools. So companies like LinkedIn are going to use data to help identify the skills that employers need. Companies like Capital One are going to help recruit, train, and employ more new tech workers, not out of charity, but because it's a smart business decision.

All of this is going to help us to match the job to the worker. And the private sector will be involved in this out of self-interest, but it means that you, the leaders at the local level, are going to have to help create these platforms and facilitate this kind of job match.

Finally, we're launching a \$100 million competition for innovative ideas to train and employ people who are underrepresented in tech. At a time when we all lead digital lives, anybody who has the drive and the will to get into this field should have a way to do so, a pathway to do so.

So my administration is committed to this initiative. We've got a lot of private and non-profit sectors leading the way. We want to get more onboard. But ultimately, success is going to rest on folks like you—on mayors, councilmembers, local leaders—because you've got the power to bring your communities together and seize this incredible economic development opportunity that could change the way we think about training and hiring the workers of tomorrow. And the good news is, these workers may emerge from the unlikeliest places.

So let me wrap up with just the example of one person, a woman named LaShana Lewis. Where's LaShana? She's here today. I hear she was here. There she is over there. There's LaShana.

Now, the reason LaShana's story is so relevant is, LaShana grew up in East St. Louis. She had a passion for computers. But because of circumstances, constraints—she wasn't born with a silver spoon in her mouth—she wasn't able to get a college degree, and because she didn't have a college degree, she couldn't even get an interview for a tech job, despite her coding skills. So she was working as a bus driver, and she was working in entry-level jobs.

But LaShana apparently is a stubborn person—[laughter]—which is good. Sometimes, you need to be stubborn. So she refused to give up on her dream, and she used her free time to teach herself new computer skills. And she started going to a coding "meetup" that was run by LaunchCode, which is a non-profit that finds talented people across St. Louis and gives them the training and credibility

for the tech jobs employers are desperately needing to fill in—as we speak. So LaShana had the skills. LaunchCode went to bat for her. And today, she's a system engineer at MasterCard.

Now, LaShana—it's a great story, but understand this—MasterCard wants to hire more folks like LaShana. Moreover, 40 percent of LaunchCode's first class came in unemployed. Ninety percent of its graduates were hired full time, with an average starting salary of \$50,000 a year.

So that's what's already happening, but it's happening at a small scale. And what we need to do is expand it. And in each of your communities, there is an opportunity to find talent like LaShana, help them get credentialed, help them focus the skills they've already got, work with non-for-profits, work with businesses, match them up. Next thing you know, you've got a systems engineer; they've got a good job. Companies are excited; they're able to expand. Your tax base is improving. You can reach out and train even more folks. You get on a virtuous cycle of change.

And it doesn't require huge amounts of money. It requires some planning and organization and coordination, and the Federal Government is going to be your partner in this process.

So we've got to create more stories like LaShana's. And if we do, then we are going to more effectively capture what is the boundless energy and talent of Americans who have the will, but sometimes need a little help clearing out the way. Help them get on a path to fill the new jobs of this new century.

And that's what middle class economics looks like. I said this weekend that Americans don't believe in anybody getting a free ride, and Americans don't believe in equality of outcomes. We understand that you've got—we've got to work hard in this country. You don't just sit around waiting for something to happen, you've got to go get it.

But we do believe in equal opportunity. We do believe in expanding opportunity to everybody who's willing to work hard. We do believe that, in this country, no matter what you

look like or where you come from, how you started out, if you're willing to put in some blood and sweat and tears, you should be able to make it and get a decent job and get a decent wage and send your kids to college and retire with dignity and respect and have health care you can count on and have a safe community.

You—we do believe that. And that's what I'm committed to doing these last 2 years. And I'm going to need the League of Cities to help

me do it; work with you to build an economy where everybody shares in America's prosperity and everybody is contributing to America's prosperity.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:39 a.m. at the Washington Marriott Wardman Park hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Ralph E. Becker, Jr., of Salt Lake City, UT.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With President Donald Franciszek Tusk of the European Council and an Exchange With Reporters

March 9, 2015

President Obama. Well, it is a great pleasure to welcome Donald Tusk to the White House in his new role. I had outstanding experiences working with him during the time that he was Prime Minister of Poland, one of our closest allies, and was consistently impressed with his outstanding work and his strong support for the transatlantic alliance. We are very pleased that he is carrying on those same skills and values to the European Council.

And let me just say at the outset that I think transatlantic unity is as strong as it's ever been. We face a number of significant challenges. Obviously, a major topic of conversation today will be the situation in Ukraine. We are all committed to making sure that we uphold the basic principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity that have been threatened by Russian aggression. We've been able to maintain strong unity with respect to sanctions.

We very much appreciate the work that's been done by Chancellor Angela Merkel and President François Hollande to establish a Minsk process. But we also know from experiences over the last year that unless we have strong monitoring and strong implementation, that these agreements will be meaningless.

And so part of what we'll be discussing is how do we make sure that we are able to monitor effectively what's happening on the ground in Ukraine and how do we continue to main-

tain pressure on Russia, on the separatists, to abide by these agreements?

We'll also have an opportunity to talk about the significant challenges that the Ukrainian economy faces. We have to make sure that the 90 percent of Ukraine that is still effectively governed by Kiev is able to succeed. And that requires that we work together, Europe and the United States, to supplement the work that's being done by the IMF.

We'll also be talking about a wide range of other issues. We share concerns about global growth and the global economy, and this will be an opportunity for us to highlight the opportunities of strengthening trade through the transatlantic trade agreement that is currently being discussed between the two parties. We'll have a chance to discuss the situation in Greece and what more can be done to bolster European growth, which obviously has been lagging over the course of the last 7, 8 years and ends up having an impact on the world economy and the U.S. economy.

We'll have an opportunity to talk about some of the security challenges that we face both—beyond Ukraine, including the situation in Libya, the situation in Iraq, the need for us to be unified in our fight against ISIL, but also to work effectively to prevent foreign fighters from getting to Syria, as well as foreign fighters leaving Syria and coming back to Europe and