

Biden, as your representative in reaching and helping parties to reach that agreement.

As you will have seen in recent days, implementation can always be the hardest part of any agreement, and I urge the Northern Ireland parties—as you have done, Mr. President—to do all that they can to ensure that the current roadblock is overcome, as I'm sure it will be, and that the agreement can be implemented in full. We therefore appreciate your ongoing engagement and your support, and that of all our friends in the United States, as we continue to build permanent peace and reconciliation in Ireland.

Mr. President, as you said on the conclusion of the Stormont House Agreement, where there is courage and a will, these changes can happen. In your brilliant Selma speech a few weeks ago, you said that the march is not yet over. I agree with that sentiment. Nor can it be, until democratically elected politicians decide to make decisions that are of benefit to all.

In Ireland, we're now in a decade of commemorations marking the hundredth anniversary of the tumultuous events that resulted in our country achieving its independence. Next year, we commemorate the anniversary of the 1916 Rising in Ireland and around the globe, including a major festival here in Washington in the Kennedy Center.

This year, as you know, is also the 150th anniversary of the birth of the great poet W.B. Yeats, to whom you have referred, Mr. Presi-

dent. We will mark that event with many occasions in Ireland, here in the U.S., and around the world. And to mark that particular anniversary, Mr. President, this year, the Shamrock Bowl is engraved with one of his most famous and beautiful poems: "He Wishes for the Cloth of Heaven." The last line reads in that, Mr. President, if I recall it correctly, to paraphrase it, tread softly, for you tread upon our dreams.

[*Prime Minister Kenny spoke briefly in Irish, and no translation was provided. He then spoke in English as follows.*]

Prime Minister Kenny. Happy St. Patrick's Day to you all. Have a wonderful occasion here in the present—[*applause*].

President Obama. Everybody, enjoy yourselves. Have fun, don't break anything, and you can take the paper napkins, but not the cloth ones. [*Laughter*] They don't belong to be, and I want my security deposit back. [*Laughter*] Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:34 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Richard N. Haass, president, Council on Foreign Relations. He also referred to his cousin Henry Healy. Prime Minister Kenny referred to former Sen. Gary W. Hart, in his capacity as the U.S. Secretary of State's Personal Representative for Northern Ireland.

Remarks to the City Club of Cleveland and a Question-and-Answer Session in Cleveland, Ohio

March 18, 2015

The President. Hello, Cleveland! Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you, everybody. Please, please, have a seat. It's good to be back in Cleveland.

Let me begin by thanking Paul for the wonderful introduction. I want to acknowledge some of my favorite Members of Congress. [*Laughter*] Senator Sherrod Brown is here. I actually like his wife Connie a little more. [*Laughter*] I'm not alone in that. But he's okay

too. [*Laughter*] Congresswoman Kaptur is here. Congresswoman Fudge is here. Mayor Jackson is here. Thank you so much. Where's the Mayor? He's around here somewhere.

I want to thank Don Moulthrop and the members of the City Club for inviting me here today. It is wonderful to be back in this city. And I see a lot of friends and, in some cases, mentors. Pastor, it's wonderful to see you again. Otis Moss is one of my favorite people.

Now, every sitting President since Ronald Reagan has come here, to the City Club of Cleveland, to take your questions. And that's because this is an institution that reflects what is a truly American idea. That's the belief that all of us have a role to play in resolving the most important issues of our time. In a democracy, the most important office is the office of citizen. And the City Club tradition reflects that.

Now, over the course of my Presidency, one that began in the depths of a historic crisis, no issue has been more important than the future of our economy. That's certainly been of great interest in Ohio and in Cleveland. No topic has weighed more heavily on the minds of ordinary families, and no subject is more worthy of a great, big, open debate.

Seventy-five years ago, another President came here to Cleveland to engage in this debate. He was nearing the end of his second term, 8 years in office marked by a devastating Depression, a hard-fought recovery, fierce political divisions at home, looming threats overseas. But for all the challenges of a changing world, FDR refused to accept the notion that we are anything less than the masters of our fate. "We are characters in this living book of democracy," he said. "But we are also its author. It falls upon us now to say whether the chapters that are to come will tell a story of retreat or of continued advance."

Now, that's a pretty good summary of where we are today. That was the choice that was laid out back then: a story of retreat, or a story of continued advance. America chose the latter, and we're better for it. And three-quarters of a century later, we face a similar choice. In a world changing even faster than his, do we retreat from the realities of a 21st-century economy? Or do we continue to advance, together, to renew this country's founding promise of opportunity for everybody and not just some?

So before I take questions, I want to spend some time talking about that choice, and I want to set the stage by talking about where the economy is today.

Following the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression—in fact, by some mea-

asures, the contraction of our economy was faster and deeper than the great recessions; we just pulled out of it faster because we had learned some lessons from the past—we're now in the midst of the longest streak of private sector job growth on record: 60 consecutive months, 5 straight years, 12 million new jobs.

America's businesses have added more than 200,000 jobs each month for 12 straight months. That's the first time that's happened in nearly 40 years. Our unemployment rate has fallen from a peak of 10 percent in 2009. When I first came into office, we were losing jobs at a pace of almost 800,000 jobs per month; today, the unemployment rate is at 5.5 percent. Just last year, we saw the fastest unemployment rate decline in 30 years. And in one of the most hopeful signs, middle class wages are finally starting to tick up again, finally starting to go up.

Now, this progress is no accident. First and foremost, it's the direct result of you, the drive and determination of the American people. But I'm going to take a little credit. *[Laughter]* It's also the result of decisions made by my administration, in partnership from—with some of these Members of Congress who are here, to prevent a second depression and to lay a new foundation for growth and prosperity. And a lot of those decisions were controversial. And not—and then, there was a lot of resistance and obstruction. But we decided to continue to advance.

We believed that if the last decade was defined by outsourcing of good jobs overseas, then we could define this decade by bringing back good jobs to America. And today, there are more job openings in the United States than at any time since 2001. The auto industry that we rescued, despite the fact that it was not popular at the time, is firing on all cylinders. That's making a difference right here in Ohio.

Factories are opening their doors at the fastest pace in nearly two decades. Over the last 5 years, manufacturers have added jobs at a rate not seen since the 1980s. Everybody talked about manufacturing being dead. You know what, manufacturing is actually growing at a faster pace than the rest of the economy.

And more foreign companies are realizing that “Made in the U.S.A.” is a trademark to be proud of, and they’re choosing to invest in America, something that I’m going to discuss next week at our SelectUSA Summit, where we get local and State officials and economic development organizations to meet with foreign investors from around the world in one-stop shopping to start getting more investment and more businesses right here in the United States.

We believed that we could prepare our kids and our workers for a more competitive world. And today, our younger students earn the highest math and reading scores on record. Our high school graduation rate hit another all-time high. More Americans are earning their degrees than ever before.

We believed we could grow the economy and create new jobs even while we were reducing our dependence on foreign oil and even as we were tackling climate change and protecting our planet. Today, America’s not just number one in oil and gas. We’re number one in wind power. Last year was the biggest year for solar power in our history. We’re producing 3 times as much wind power and 10 times as much solar power as we did when I came into office.

Every 3 weeks, we produce as much solar power as we did in all of 2008. And just last month, the world’s largest solar installation came online in the California desert. The solar industry is adding jobs 10 times faster than the rest of the economy. And meanwhile, thanks to lower gas prices and higher fuel standards, the typical family this year should save more than 700 bucks at the pump.

We believed that sensible regulations could prevent another crisis and shield families from ruin and encourage fair competition. And today, we’ve got the tools to stop taxpayer-funded bailouts. We’ve got a new consumer watchdog to protect families from predatory lending and credit card practices, saving billions of dollars to American consumers.

Oh, and by the way, there’s this thing called the Affordable Care Act. More than 16 million more Americans have gained the security of

health care coverage. We’ve cut the ranks of the uninsured by a third, thanks to some tough, proud votes by these Members of Congress. Last year, the growth in health care premiums, the costs for business, matched its lowest level on record. If premiums had kept on growing over the last 4 years at the rate they had in the previous decade, the average family premium would be \$1,800 higher than it is today.

Now, we don’t get a lot of credit for that. But keep in mind that some of the reforms that we’re putting in place are not only giving more people insurance, but we’re actually reducing the overall costs: \$1,800 in people’s pockets. They don’t notice it, because it’s what didn’t happen. That’s \$1,800 that firms can use to hire and invest; \$1,800 that you’re spending on a computer for your kids or to help pay down debt and stabilize your finances or put into retirement.

And finally, we believed that we could lay this new foundation for growth while still getting our fiscal house in order. You’ll recall that when I first came into office, deficits were skyrocketing, partly because the economy was plummeting: less tax revenue coming in, more going out. And the notion was that the steps we took to ensure the economy recovered was going to cause even higher deficits, red ink as far as the eye could see. Well, since I took office, we’ve cut our deficits as a share of our economy by about two-thirds. Two-thirds!

And looking forward, our long-term deficit projections have improved as well, in part because we’ve done such a good job in controlling health care costs. The Affordable Care Act alone will cut our deficits by more than a trillion dollars over the next two decades. The slowing growth in health care costs has saved the Medicare system tens of billions of dollars. Health care was the single biggest factor driving up our projected deficits. It’s now the single biggest factor driving them down.

This is progress that every American can be proud of. Now, we’ve got a long way to go. I am not satisfied; I know you aren’t either. We’ve got a lot more work to do. Any American will tell you that. But we have emerged from what was a once-in-a-generation crisis

better positioned for the future than any of our competitors. We've picked ourselves up, dusted ourselves off, retooled, retrained, refocused. The United States of America is coming back.

Now, I want to return to the issue of the debate that we were having then because it bears on the debate we're having now. It's important to note that at every step that we've taken over the past 6 years, we were told our goals were misguided, they were too ambitious, that my administration's policies would crush jobs and explode deficits and destroy the economy forever. Remember that?

Audience members. Yes.

The President. Because sometimes, we don't do the instant replay—[laughter]—we don't run the tape back, and then we end up having the same argument going forward.

One Republican in Congress warned our policies would “diminish employment” and “diminish stock prices.” Diminish stock prices. [Laughter] The stock market has doubled since I came into office. Corporate profits are—corporate balance sheets are stronger than they have ever been—because of my terrible business policies. [Laughter]

One Republican Senator claimed we faced trillion-dollar deficits as far as the eye can see. Another predicted my reelection would spike gas prices to \$6.60 a gallon. [Laughter] I don't know how he came up with that figure—\$6.60. [Laughter] My opponent in that last election pledged that he could bring down the unemployment rate to 6 percent by 2016—next year—at the end of next year. It's 5.5 now.

And right here in Cleveland, the leader of the House Republicans, a good friend of mine—[laughter]—he captured his party's economic theories by critiquing mine with a very simple question. “Where are the jobs?” he said. “Where are the jobs?” I'm sure there was a headline in the Plain Dealer or one of the papers: “Where's the Jobs?”

Well, after 12 million new jobs, a stock market that has more than doubled, deficits that have been cut by two-thirds, health care inflation at the lowest rate in nearly 50 years, manufacturing coming back, auto industry coming

back, clean energy doubled, I've come not only to answer that question, but I want to return to the debate that is central to this country and the alternative economic theory that's presented by the other side.

Because their theory does not change. It really doesn't. It's a theory that says, if we do little more than just cut taxes for those at the very top, if we strip out regulations and let special interests write their own rules, prosperity trickles down to the rest of us. And I take the opposite view. And I take it not for ideological reasons, but for historic reasons, because of the evidence.

We know from the facts that are all—that they're there for all to see—that America does better, our economy does better, everybody does better when the middle class does better and we've got more ladders for people to get into the middle class if they're willing to work hard. We do better when everyone grows together: top, middle, bottom. We do better when everyone has a chance not only to benefit from America's success, but also to contribute to America's success. And we know from more recent history that when we stray from that ideal, it doesn't turn out well. We've now got evidence there is a better way, there is a better approach. And I'm calling it middle class economics.

For the first 8 years of this century, before I came into office, we tried trickle-down economics. We slashed taxes for folks at the top, stripped out regulations, didn't make investments in the things we know we need to grow. At the end of those 8 years, we had soaring deficits, record job losses, an economy in crippling recession.

In the years since then, we've tried middle class economics. Today, we've got dramatically lower deficits, a record streak of job creation, an economy that's steadily growing.

So when we, the American people, when the public evaluates who's got the better argument here, we've got to look at the facts. It's not abstractions. There may have been a time when you could just say, well, those two theories are equally valid. They're differences of opinion. They could have been abstract economic argu-

ments in a book somewhere. But not anymore. Reality has rendered its judgment: Trickle-down economics does not work, and middle class economics does.

And that's what we should keep in mind when we think about what's going to take us forward: not down a path where we slow down businesses by slashing investments in the future; not a path where we put our economy at risk again with Government shutdowns or fiscal shutdowns; not down a path where just a few of us do spectacularly well and folks who are working hard see their incomes, their wages, their financial security erode. We need to go forward to an economy that's generating rising incomes and chances for everybody who is willing to work hard; on that continued advance where we invest in our future, give working Americans the tools they need to determine their own fate—research, education, infrastructure, job training.

We know the recipe for growth, and we know that we can make growth broad based. And we can raise incomes and wages in the process. And those incomes and wages then get plowed back into businesses and investment, and we get on a virtuous cycle.

Now, a good place to start down a stronger path involves America's budget, the blueprint for what we believe this country should be. Where should we go? The budget is not just numbers on a page, it reflects our values and our priorities.

Now, Republicans in Congress have been working hard to reposition their rhetoric around the economy. They started noticing that people would like to see someone champion the middle class and folks who are trying to get in the middle class. So we've seen a shift in how they talk about the issues.

There was one Republican who said she couldn't agree with me more that we need to be helping working moms and dads more. Another wrote a policy memo saying that Republicans must define themselves as the party of the American worker, the party of higher wages. Another urged his party to shout at the top of its lungs, the GOP is the ticket to the middle class.

Now, this is good. This is a good development. I'm encouraged by this, because once you get everybody talking about the same thing, now we can decide, all right, how do we do it? If we can at least share our goals, if the goal is strengthening the middle class, creating more ladders of opportunity for the middle class, raising wages, that's good. There's nothing I'd like more than an opposition party that works with me to help hard-working Americans get ahead. I don't have another election to run. [*Laughter*] Come, let's go. Let's work.

Now, the problem, though, is, so far, at least, the rhetoric doesn't match the reality. The walk doesn't sync up with the talk. And all you have to do is look at the budget that House Republicans put forward just yesterday. And it's a budget that doesn't just fail to embrace middle class economics, it's the opposite of middle class economics, doubles down on trickle-down.

I don't expect you, by the way, to read the budget—theirs or mine—but you can do some fact-checking on this. Their budget does not even more to those who already have the most, makes massive cuts to investments that benefit all of us, asks middle class families to foot the bill. It's a budget that claims that reducing our deficit should be our very highest priority, despite the fact that the deficit has been reduced by two-thirds. But its very first proposal, its centerpiece is to spend hundreds of billions of dollars, maybe even trillions of dollars, on another giant tax cut slanted overwhelmingly in favor of those at the top. If you are claiming that deficit reduction is your number-one priority, how can you start by giving a tax cut to everybody at the top and not doing much to help folks down the economic pyramid?

Under the Republican budget, millionaires and billionaires would get an average tax cut of more than \$50,000 per year. Translation: The average millionaire would take home about as much in tax cuts as the average middle class American makes in an entire year. Now, they say they'll also close high-income tax loopholes for folks at the top, which I've put some very specific proposals for how we can do that.

Their budget does not name a single loophole it would close. Not one.

This budget does provide nothing to prevent tax cuts from expiring for 26 million working families and students. I mean, these are folks who for almost two decades now have gone without a raise, but their budget lets these tax cuts expire. That's the equivalent of a thousand-dollar-a-year pay cut for these families.

So you can call cutting taxes for the top 1 percent while letting taxes rise for working families a lot of things. What you can't call it is a ticket to the middle class. That you cannot do.

Allowing tax cuts for working families to expire doesn't get you close to this "budgets cut at all cost" goal of a \$5 trillion in deficit reduction. Republican leaders say we need to keep bringing down our deficits. I think we should bring down our deficits; my budget would keep our deficits below 3 percent of GDP. And that's a rate that most economists agree protects our fiscal health. But because House Republicans want to balance the budget without asking any sacrifices of the wealthiest Americans—in fact, asking them to sacrifice less—that means that everybody else has to sacrifice more. Middle class has to sacrifice more. Those working to join the middle class have to sacrifice more.

The authors of this budget were careful not to get too specific about the cuts they proposed, and they kind of imply that, well, no matter who you are, somebody else is going to bear the burden. But compared to the plan I've put forward, if the cuts they've proposed were to fall equally on everybody, here is just some of what would happen over the next few years. We're getting to questions. I just want to—I've really got to bear down on this thing.

Investments in education would be cut to their lowest levels since 2000—15 years ago—at a time when we know we need to be upping our game in education because of competition around the world: 157,000 fewer children would have the chance to get early education through Head Start; more than 8 million low-income students would see their financial aid cut. Investments in job training would be cut to the point where more than 4 million fewer

workers would have the chance to earn higher wages through programs to help them upgrade their skills. We would end partnerships that help 30,000 small manufacturers grow their businesses and create good jobs, including right here in Cleveland.

These aren't just new cuts; these are some of the greatest hits on this broken record. [Laughter]

And just as more working families are finally beginning to feel some hard-fought stability and security in their lives, the Republican budget would strip health insurance for millions of Americans. It would take away coverage from millions more who rely on Medicaid, including right here in Ohio: nursing home patients, children with autism, parents of children with disabilities who need at-home care. It would try once again to gut the guarantee at the center of Medicare by turning it into a voucher program.

Instead of the promise that health care will be there for you when you need it, you get a roll of the dice. If you get sick and that voucher is enough to cover the costs of your care, then you win. But if not, you lose. Programs that help low-income parents care for sick children or buy food for their families or put a roof over their heads, all those would be in the cross-hairs.

And at a time of new and evolving threats overseas, the Republican budget, despite all the talk they have about national security, would actually cut our core national security funding to its lowest level in a decade. And still, those at the top aren't asked to sacrifice a single dime.

So lower taxes for the most well off, higher taxes for working families; gutted investments in education, job training, infrastructure, military, and our national security; kicking tens of millions of Americans off their health insurance; ending Medicare as we know it.

If you have heard these kinds of arguments about this kind of budget before, that's because you have seen this kind of budget before. Republicans in Congress have put forward the same proposals year after year after year, regardless of the realities of the economy. When the economy is in a slump, we need tax cuts.

When the economy is doing well, you know what, let's try some tax cuts. [Laughter]

We know now that the gloom-and-doom predictions that justified this budget 3, 4, 5 years ago were wrong. Despite the economic progress, despite the mountains of new evidence, their approach hasn't changed.

There's nothing wrong with changing your opinion if the underlying facts change. Serious economic proposals change when the underlying assumptions are proven false. If Republicans believe we should adhere to a set of abstract principles, even though they hurt the middle class, then they should make the case. Show us. Prove it to us. If they believe it's time to end the social contract that sustains so many of us, the basic bargain of shared sacrifice and shared responsibility, own it and make the argument.

But the—you can't credibly claim that this vision is about helping working families get ahead or that this budget is a path to prosperity. It's the same argument I'm having about health care. It was one thing for them to argue against Obamacare before it was put in place. Every prediction they've made about it turned out to be wrong. So you—it's working better than even I expected. [Laughter] But it doesn't matter. Evidence be damned, it's still a disaster. Well, why?

I mean, the truth is, the budget they're putting forward and the theories they're putting forward are a path to prosperity for those who have already prospered. And in that sense, it's a story of retreat.

And I'm offering a different path. The budget I've put forward is built on middle class economics: the idea that everybody does best when everybody gets their fair shot and everybody is doing their fair share, everybody plays by the same set of rules. And it reflects the realities of the new economy by giving every American the tools they need to get ahead in a fast-paced, highly competitive, constantly changing world.

It means helping working families feel more secure in an ever-changing economy. That's why my budget makes new investments to make it easier for folks to afford childcare and

college and health care and paid leave and retirement, lowering the taxes of working families, putting thousands of dollars back into their pockets each year.

Middle class economics means preparing Americans to earn higher wages down the road. That's why my budget makes new investments from pre-K to midcareer job training. I want to make sure all our kids get a great education from the earliest age and that young people can afford to go to college without getting buried under a mountain of debt.

And so we're working with private companies and community colleges and universities and businesses to provide apprenticeships and on-the-job training and other pathways into the middle class. And I've proposed making 2 years of community college as free and universal as high school is today, to up our game.

Now, third, middle class economics means building the most competitive economy anywhere so that our businesses can keep churning out high-wage jobs for our workers to fill. And right before I came here, I went to MAGNET. It's a manufacturing incubator right here in Cleveland where smaller companies are making everything from airplane parts and medical devices to whiskey. I did not sample the whiskey before I came here. [Laughter] Although I'm taking a sample home. [Laughter]

And this partnership is bringing good manufacturing jobs back to Cleveland. The Republican budget would cut the whole thing entirely. If something is working, why would we get rid of it? We should invest in it. Which is why today I announced nearly \$500 million in new public and private investment for American manufacturing. And that includes a new manufacturing hub that will make America a leader in producing high-tech fabrics for uniforms our soldiers wear in battle.

And 21st-century businesses need 21st-century infrastructure, which is why my budget invests in modern ports and stronger bridges and faster trains and the fastest Internet and invests in basic research so that the jobs and industries of the future are created right here in the United States. And we can pay for these investments in a responsible way. Not by adding

to the deficit, we just need to cut wasteful loopholes and ask those at the very top to pay their fair share and reform our Tax Code to make our businesses more competitive.

And we can keep our exports and protect our workers with a strong new trade deal—first in Asia, then in Europe—that aren't just free, but are also fair. I've had a lot of conversations with the delegation from Ohio about this, because here in Ohio, you saw firsthand a lot of past trade deals didn't always live up to the hype. And that's why the trade deal I'm negotiating now, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, would reform NAFTA with higher labor standards, higher environmental standards, new tools to hold countries accountable; would focus on the impact it's having on American workers; and would make sure that the rules of the 21st-century economy in some of the largest markets in the world aren't written by China. They need to be written by the United States of America, and that's what this does.

So helping hard-working families make ends meet, giving them the tools they need for a new economy, revving the engines of growth and competitiveness—that's what middle class economics offers. That's where America needs to go. If we make these investments in ourselves and our prosperity and our future, this economy is not just going to be stronger a year from now or 5 years from now, it will stronger for decades. And it falls upon us now—remember those words of FDR—it falls upon us now to say whether the chapters that are to come will tell a story of retreat or a story of continued advance.

I believe in continued advance. The challenges that this generation of Americans has faced, they're less dire than those that the greatest generation endured. But we've got the same will. We've got the same drive. We've got the same innate optimism required to shape another American century. We know what works. We know what we have to do. We've just got to put aside the stale and outmoded debates, reject failed policies, embrace the policies that we know work, embrace the promise of the future. And we're not just going to then move forward, we're going to write the next

great chapter of our continued advance in this living book of democracy.

All right. Thank you, Cleveland. God bless you.

Let's take some questions. Come on. Okay. So, Paul, I can just start calling on people, right?

City Club of Cleveland Board President Paul Harris. Yes, sir.

The President. Okay, I like that. [Laughter]

All right, so the only thing I'm going to do is—raise your hand. I'll call on you. If you could stand up, introduce yourself. And I'm going to go boy, girl, boy, girl. [Laughter] All right. We'll start with that young lady right there—no, no, right here. Yes, you.

Legal Aid Reform

Q. All right. Thank you.

The President. What's your name?

Q. My name is Colleen Cotter. I'm the executive director of the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland. And my question for you, Mr. President—thank you, first, so much for coming to Cleveland. My question is, you talked about the importance of everyone playing by the same rules.

The President. Right.

Q. Unfortunately, millions of Americans—because we do not have the right to court-appointed counsel in civil cases—cannot enforce the rules that are out to protect them, whether as tenants, consumers, preventing foreclosure. How do you propose that we address that very important issue?

The President. Well, as you know, we've worked hard to continue to support legal aid around the country. This was a target of slashed budgets early in the previous administration. We have not fully recovered. And with the existing Congress, it's unlikely that we get the kind of bump up that we need.

Two things, I think, we can do, though, is, one, in addition to the Federal Government helping, I think we can elicit more from law firms than they currently cough up. Young lawyers are eager to participate if it's structured properly.

The other thing is to create in various jurisdictions more efficient, effective civil procedures, potentially, that can streamline the process. Because a lot of the clients that you work with, they don't—we don't need a full-blown court process and filings and motions and—that's taking forever. And oftentimes, when people are in desperate straits, let's say, they've been cheated on or something by a landlord, or by—they bought a product, and it turned out to be faulty, and they're trying to get some relief—they can't necessarily afford some lengthy process. And your office should be reserved for the toughest cases.

So are there ways in which we can structure more effective dispute resolution mechanisms? Now, that's going to necessarily operate probably jurisdiction by jurisdiction. But some jurisdictions have come up with some creative ways to fill the holes that arose as a consequence of the legal aid cuts that took place a long time ago. And what we should do is highlight those best practices, see if we can get them duplicated across the board.

But thank you for the good work that you're doing. Proud of you.

All right. It's a gentleman's turn. Let's see. Right there. You, yes. Nice-looking bow tie.

Q. Thank you.

The President. You're welcome.

Community Colleges

Q. My name is Greg Hutchins. I'm the superintendent in Shaker Heights City Schools. You visited us twice already. That was nice.

The President. That's a great school system.

Q. Yes, I wasn't the superintendent at that time, but it was a great, and still is a great, school system.

My question is regarding the community college initiative and how it affects the middle class. I think that some of our community colleges here in Cleveland, as well as across the country, they get a bad reputation that they don't provide a high-quality education, which I believe that they do. How can we better convey a message to all of our constituents and possible future community college-enrolled students, how can we convey the message that

the community college does have a high-quality education and we can prepare our kids?

The President. Well, I tell you what, I'm doing my darnedest to advertise. Because one of our greatest comparative advantages is our higher education system here in the United States. Obviously, we've got the best universities in the world, and people flock from everywhere to try to get an education. But we also have an unparalleled community college system. And there are places like Lorraine that are doing great work.

The challenge we've got is that they're underutilized. Oftentimes, we're not linking what community college is doing with high schools, on the one hand, and 4-year universities and businesses, on the other. So part of our initiative is not just to make the first 2 years of community college free, because not everybody needs a 4-year education. Some people may be interested in graphic design or interested in manufacturing processes or even, in some cases, high-tech jobs that don't require a 4-year degree, but they do require some advanced training. And if they can get that first 2 years free without debt, plugged into a business, they've saved money. They don't have all those student loans to pay. They can work for a time, learn more in their career. Then, maybe they go back and decide to get a higher degree.

If they decide to take the community college and then springboard into a 4-year university, they transfer their credits. They've just saved themselves half the cost of that 4-year college degree.

So what we're trying to do is to create more and more partnerships suited for the particular inclinations, aptitudes, needs of the public. In some cases, what's needed, for example, for a midcareer person, is a quick training program that gets them in a job right away. So increasingly, what we're doing is working with community colleges to reach out to the businesses in their community where there are job openings and have the business help design the training program, collapse the training program.

A midcareer person who needs a job right away—maybe a single mom or a guy who's

been laid off and now needs to get back in the workforce—they don't have the luxury necessarily of 2 years of study. Get them into something where 6, 8, 10 weeks of training, and right now we—if you complete this successfully, we know there's going to be a job for you because the business helped design the program.

If you are a high school student who is interested in doing something that doesn't necessarily require a 4-year degree, we're getting community colleges to link up with the high school ahead of time. The high school student can then start getting credit, get a hands-on experience, in some cases, with business who are partnering with the community college. And now that high school student has gotten a head start on moving into the career, and they're also saving money in the process.

If it's a student who wants to go to 4-year university, but they don't have the money to, let's say, come right away to Cleveland State—even though Cleveland State is a pretty good price relative to a lot of other schools—go to that community college first, but make sure that they are getting up front the kind of counseling that they need so that they're taking the credits that are transferrable in the fields that they need, so that they're not wasting time in the community college, taking out Pell grants and loans, then they get to the 4-year university and they have got to start all over again. Right?

So in each of these cases, by us linking businesses, 4-year institutions, community colleges, high schools, we can create a series of pathways of success. And it can be lifelong. And the great thing about community colleges is they're flexible in ways that 4-year institutions, because of the nature of those institutions, it's a little harder to do. Community colleges, they can adapt and meet a need quickly. So a new business comes to town, we need machine tool operators, or we need coders, or we need whatever it is. Potentially, you can design something quickly that's effective and makes an immediate difference.

So we've put a lot of resources into community colleges. We are highlighting these pro-

grams, encouraging the kinds of lengths that I just described, and we're going to keep on doing it.

Okay. Let's see. Right there, go ahead. She was very excited to ask me a question. [Laughter]

NCAA Basketball Championship

Q. My name is Helen Sheehan, and welcome to Cleveland. We love this city. Hard-working city and hard-working county. So thank you for coming. I have a two-part question. First, who's in your bracket? [Laughter]

The President. I wasn't that creative. I think Kentucky is going to take it. But you know, I haven't won in—since my first year in office. [Laughter] Clearly, I'm not spending as much time watching college basketball as I once did. [Laughter] So I wouldn't necessarily take my bracket and copy it, although I suspect I'm not the only person picking Kentucky. [Laughter]

Q. No, I have too.

The President. That's what I figured.

Congressional Gridlock/Infrastructure/Immigration/Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act/Political Participation

Q. The second part of my question is, since you've been in office, what has surprised you the most?

The President. That's an interesting question: What surprised me the most? I'll start by saying what has not surprised me. [Laughter] I'm not surprised by the decency and determination and grit and resilience and hard work of the American people and the fact that they're not as divided as Washington would seem to reflect.

Because I travel around the country a lot. One of the great things about being President is, you can pretty much go anywhere. [Laughter] You say, hey, can I—I want to come by. Okay. [Laughter] And so you can go to factories, and you can go to community colleges, and you can go to national parks and go to every State and meet people. And it turns out that what I talked about back in 2004 about this being a United States of America, it really

is true outside of Washington. And that's encouraging. That makes me happy.

What has surprised me, even though I had served in the Senate, was the continued difficulties in Congress getting stuff done that shouldn't be controversial.

There are some issues that I knew would be controversial. I mean, we know that if there's a debate in Congress about abortion, that's going to be controversial. There are strong-held views on each side. They're hard to reconcile. We understand that. And that's part of democracy, and it never gets perfectly resolved.

But I have been pushing for us to fund infrastructure since I came into office, because we've got two trillion dollars' worth of dilapidated roads, bridges, sewer lines, and then, there's a whole new infrastructure that we have to build in terms of a smart grid that's more secure and reliable in terms of how we use energy and making it more efficient. There are broadband lines that still need to be going out into every part of the country.

Now, the Recovery Act that I passed, with the help of these Members of Congress, when we first came in didn't just help to avert recession. It also was the largest investment in infrastructure in decades. And we made significant progress, for example, in just getting broadband lines out into rural areas. So we made some progress on it. But we've still got a whole bunch to do.

And if you talk privately to our Republican friends, they'll say, yes, I know, we really need to do some infrastructure. Well, why aren't we doing it? And the reason is the degree to which constant campaigning and sort of the polarization of the bases and the inability, it seems, to just agree on a core set of facts means even when some of our Republican friends want to work with us, it's hard to do. They are worried that they'll get attacked or they'll be viewed as compromisers or they'll get a primary challenge when somebody—by somebody further to the right, and it becomes hard to just get basic stuff done.

And obviously, the greatest example of this was when the Government was shut down, or

just recently, the threat that the Department of Homeland Security was going to be shut down.

We can have a significant debate about immigration. Not everybody is going to agree with my view that we are a nation of immigrants and we have a broken system and we can craft an immigration agenda that holds into account folks who came here illegally, forces them to have a background check, they've got to pay back-taxes, but gives them a pathway and, in turn, strengthens our borders. That's my view. It's good for the economy. I can look—point to the evidence. But I understand some folks won't agree with me.

The notion, though, that you would then threaten to not fund the very department that is responsible for securing our borders because you're mad that our borders are not secured—*[laughter]*—that's not a good way of doing business. So that surprises me a little bit. *[Laughter]*

And I think that the other—this is a connected issue, and I'll make this last point and go to the next question.

I think it's hard for voters to see why it is that things aren't working in Washington. They get frustrated that they're not working, but there's this kind of sense, well, a plague on both their houses, partly because the media is so splintered up. If you're watching Fox News, you get an entirely different reality than if you're watching MSNBC. And so everything is just, like, an opinion. But there are hard, cold facts about how things work and who is being responsible and who's not. And it—the challenge is making sure that voters are aware of that and then hold elected officials accountable for their positions.

That's why I talked about the budget. Now, the Republican budget will not end up getting passed. My budget won't be passed, given I've got to work with a Republican Congress. But it is a reflection of what our priorities are. And it's good for people to know what's in there. And our democracy only works when we're informed enough that we can say, well, you know what, I don't think we should cut Medicaid for families that have a disabled child. That's not who we are. And I know my neighbor who relies on that. That's important.

I may not like Obama, but if I've got—if we know that there's 16 million people who now have health insurance, and my health insurance hasn't been affected, and in fact, health care premiums across the board are going up at a slower rate than they have in 50 years, it's not clear to me why I would want to have 16 million suddenly not have health insurance who are then going to be going to the emergency room, and then I'm going to end up paying for them because somebody has got to pay for them, and I'm going to pay higher premiums.

That's—it's that, if we know what the issues are and who is taking what positions, then I think our democracy functions well. Right now what happens is, people just hear, "There's a mess, there's an argument, they're at it again," and then oftentimes people just withdraw and don't vote. And then people are cynical and dissatisfied, and that actually empowers special interests and the status quo, which we want to discourage.

All right. That was probably too long an answer. *[Laughter]*

It's a gentleman's turn. Let me ask that young man right there in the purple shirt. That's a good-looking shirt right there. Yes. Okay.

Public Service/The President's Advice to Young People

Q. Like, how can you inspire children—

The President. What's your name?

Q. Oh, my name is Nelson.

The President. Nelson.

Q. I'm a high school student at Facing History New Tech.

The President. What year are you in?

Q. A junior.

The President. Junior? Starting to think about colleges and all that?

Q. Yes.

The President. Yes? Starting to have to take all those tests? Like, Malia is going through this. Yes. *[Laughter]* Getting enough sleep?

Q. Yes.

The President. Okay, good. *[Laughter]* All right, what's your question? I'm sorry.

Q. How can you inspire children who want to follow a political career path to become the best they possibly can in the future and stuff like that?

The President. Are you interested?

Q. Yes.

The President. That's great. I'm proud of you for that.

Q. Thanks.

The President. My most important advice is worry more about what you want to do rather than what you want to be. And what do I mean by that? I think there are a lot of folks who get into politics and they say to themselves, I want to be a "blank." I want to be a Congressman, or I want to be a Senator, or I want to be a Governor, or I want to be a President. And so then their focus is on, I want to get that position. And that leads some young, ambitious people to say, well, I'll—it doesn't matter to me what I stand for, as long as I can get the position.

And you end up, maybe, if you're talented enough, getting the position, but along the way, you haven't really accomplished much. And if you do get in the position, you don't know why you're there or what you want to do with it.

And I think that politics and public service is an incredibly noble profession, but it's a hard life, as these folks will tell you. You're away from your family. You're under incredible scrutiny. People are criticizing you all the time. You miss birthday parties. You miss soccer games. You're on the road, you're at chicken dinners, and the chicken is not always great. *[Laughter]* You're not getting enough sleep. You're having to raise money.

So the only reason to do it is if you're getting something done. If you're helping somebody get health care or you're helping somebody get a job or you're making sure that our troops when they come home are treated with the dignity and respect that they deserve and are getting the benefits that they've earned, or if you're trying to clean up the environment.

So rather than think about, okay, I want that office, what I—my advice to you would be start serving. What are you passionate about? What do you care about? Do you care about some

kids in your neighborhood that maybe don't have the same opportunities because they're poor, and that really bugs you? Well, start mentoring those kids, and start volunteering at a Boys and Girls Club, and start getting your friends involved and organizing a fundraiser to build a new playground.

Are you interested in the environment, and you're worried about climate change? Well, you know what, get started now. Go find a group of like-minded people, and talk to your Members of Congress, and get educated about the issue, and start figuring out through social media how you can form a broader organization to advance the cause.

Here's the good news: If you take that approach, then even if you don't get to that office, you've done a world of good. And if you do get to that office, it will be earned, and you'll have a sense of what's important to you and what your moral compass is, so you'll be that much better as a Congressman or a mayor or a councilman or what have you.

So this is actually, by the way, pretty good advice generally, not just for public service. Because when I meet the—if you look at the most successful businesspeople, they are people who just love the thing they're doing. Steve Jobs loved computers. He loved design. He loved the Internet. So he's working on this stuff, and then it turns out you, get so absorbed in it, you end up being pretty good at it.

And then—so I always tell young people, don't wait until you get there to do something. You can do something right now.

All right, a young lady's turn.

Republican Economic Theory/Environmental Regulations/Racial Discrimination

Q. Hi.

The President. Hold on. Let's get a mike.

Q. Okay. I'm Lucy. I'm a student at Hocking. And I am wondering, that you've said that the Republicans, they've never really changed their opinion of what to do. It's always tax cuts, tax cuts. And why do you think that they're always proposing tax cuts and never changing what they think we should do? [*Laughter*]

The President. Well, look—[*laughter*—no, it's a good question. Look—and I want to be fair to their philosophy—I think they have a particular philosophy, at least today. Now, keep in mind that every party changes over time. The person who I consider the greatest President of all time, a guy named Abraham Lincoln, was also the first Republican President. There have been Democrats whose main goal was to block civil rights, back in the forties and fifties and sixties. So I want to be clear that our country works best when both parties are evolving and changing. And over certain periods of time, Democrats have been stupid and the Republicans have had better ideas, and vice versa.

Right now, at least, the core Republican philosophy and belief is that the less government interferes with the marketplace, the better off we all are. Some believe that because just philosophically, they think government is a source of coercion and interference and telling you what to do. And they believe that everybody, as long as they're not hurting anybody, should be free to do exactly what they want.

Some of it has to do with an economic theory that says capitalism and the free market is great, and so government, when it meddles and gets involved in regulations, et cetera, is hurting economic growth. Some believe that, look, if I'm out there and I'm making a whole lot of money, it's my money, and I shouldn't have to pay taxes to pay for somebody else's school or somebody else's road or what have you. So there are a bunch of reasons why I think they have the philosophy that they've got.

I think the problem right now is that we live in such a complicated, big, global society that what might be a sensible theory on paper doesn't always make sense in real life. So you may generally think, as I do, that the market is the greatest source of productivity and job creation and wealth creation in history. But our history tells us that if there's a company that's out there making a lot of money, but also pouring a bunch of pollution into the water, and it's—catches on fire—[*laughter*—and suddenly, people can't fish there anymore and people

are getting sick, that it makes sense for us to have some regulations that say, you know what, you can make your products, you can make a profit, that's great, but you're kind of messing things up, and so we're going to say you can't just dump your pollution in the water.

In theory, you might say, we don't want government forcing itself in the interactions of people. But if our history shows that racial minorities or a gay person is discriminated, we make a value judgment that says this is an exception. You can kind of do what you want, but when it comes to a hotel, you can't decide you're not going to serve somebody of a particular racial or ethnic group. You've got a business; you're not going to—we don't want you to discriminate. That's a principle that constrains your freedom, because we think that that is a value that we care about.

So that's—my philosophy is that you can have principles, but then, you have to apply them, and how are they working in the real world, and are they fair, and are they just, and are they generous and do they work? You have got to base some ideas on facts and our history. And I think sometimes, that's not what happens in Washington.

And you probably know somebody like that at school, who, it doesn't matter what happens, they keep on doing the same thing over and over again even though it doesn't work. [Laughter] And Einstein called that “madness.” [Laughter]

Last question—I'm going to take two more questions. I'm going to make an exception. [Laughter] All right. So young people have gotten some good questions, so we're going to get not as young a guy. [Laughter] Here. Yes. Go ahead. I mean, he's still pretty young.

Campaign Finance Reform/Supreme Court Decision in Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission/Gerrymandering/Political Participation/Mandatory Voting

Q. Hi, Mr. President. Kim Ankaris. You speak about the dysfunction in Washington, partly because people are trying to be reelected every so often.

The President. Yes.

Q. What about *Citizens United* and overturning that and getting some limits on campaign spending so that we bring some reality back to this situation?

The President. Well, there's no doubt that among advanced democracies, we are unique in the length of our campaigns, the almost unlimited amounts of money that are now spent. And I think it's bad for our democracy.

And I speak as somebody who has raised a lot of money. I'm very good at it. I'm proud of the fact that part of the reason I was really good at it is because we were the first sort of out of the gate to—not the first, but we really refined using the Internet for small donations and to be able to pool a lot of ordinary folks' resources to amplify our message. But I also got checks from wealthy people too. So it's not that I'm not good at it, I just don't think it's a good way for our democracy to work.

I think, first of all, it makes life miserable on Members of Congress, those—particularly those in competitive districts. There is no doubt that it has an impact on how legislation moves forward or doesn't move forward in Congress. It's not straightforward. I'm writing the check and here's my position. But there's a reason why special interests and lobbyists have undue influence in Washington, and a lot of it has to do with the fundraising that they do. And the degree to which it's spent on TV and the nature of just the blitzkrieg. You guys here in Ohio, you just feel it, right? I mean, it's just—every election season, you just got to turn off the TV. It's depressing. And it's all negative because we know—the science has shown—that people are more prone to believe the negative than the positive. And it just degrades our democracy, generally.

Now, here's the problem. *Citizens United* was a Supreme Court ruling based on the First Amendment, so it can't be overturned by statute. It could be overturned by a new Court, or it could be overturned by a constitutional amendment. And those are extraordinarily challenging processes. So I think we have to think about, what are other creative ways to reduce the influence of money, given that in the

short term we not going to be able to overturn *Citizens United*?

And I think there are other ways for us to think creatively, and we've got to have a better debate about how we make this democracy and encourage participation—how we make our democracy better and encourage more participation.

For example, the process of political gerrymandering, I think, is damaging the Congress. I don't think the insiders should draw the lines and decide who their voters are. Because I think that it—[*applause*]—and Democrats and Republicans do this, and it's great for incumbents. But it means, over time, that people aren't competing for the center because they know that if they win a Democratic primary or a Republican primary, they've won. So they just—it pushes parties away from compromise in the center.

I think that—now, I don't think I've ever said this publicly, but I'm going to go ahead and say it now. We shouldn't be making it harder to vote, we should be making it easier to vote.

And what I haven't said—I've said that publicly before. [*Laughter*] So my Justice Department is going to be vigorous in terms of trying to enforce voting rights. I gave a speech down in Selma—at the 50th anniversary that was incredibly moving for me and my daughters—and the notion that this day and age we would be deliberately trying to restrict the franchise makes no sense. And at the State and local levels, that's—you can push back against that and make sure that we're expanding the franchise, not restricting it.

In Australia and some other countries, there's mandatory voting. It would be transformative if everybody voted. That would counteract money more than anything. If everybody voted, then it would completely change the political map in this country, because the people who tend not to vote are young; they're lower income; they're skewed more heavily towards immigrant groups and minority groups; and they're often the folks who are—they're scratching and climbing to get into the middle class. And they're working hard. There's a rea-

son why some folks try to keep them away from the polls. We should want to get them into the polls. So that may end up being a better strategy in the short term.

Long term, I think it would be fun to have a constitutional amendment process about how our financial system works. But realistically, given the requirements of that process, that would be a long-term proposition.

All right, last question. It's a young lady's turn. So all the guys, you guys got to put your hands down. [*Laughter*] All right, this young lady. She's had her hand up quite a bit. Go ahead.

Recession of 2008–2009/Guantanamo Bay Detention Center

Q. Hello, Mr. President. My name is Laura Winfrey. No relation to Oprah, unfortunately. [*Laughter*] I am in seventh grade, and I attend school at Citizens Leadership Academy. My question is, if you could go back to the first day of your first term and the first day of your second term, what advice would you give yourself? [*Laughter*]

The President. That's a good question. I would have told myself to anticipate that because the recession was so bad and so tough for so many people, that I was going to have to be more aggressive in explaining to the public how long it was going to take for the recovery to take place.

Although I—this is a challenge that we had when we first came in. When FDR came in during the Great Depression, it had been so bad for 2, 3 years, that everybody understood, all right, we're kind of bottomed out, and so he could come in and then just propose, here's what we're going to do. And there was huge support because there had already been a track record of failure by the previous administration.

When we came in, things were crashing, but it hadn't yet shown up in the statistics. And it would take another 8, 9 months, even a year, before things really bottomed out. And I think people were nervous and they were scared, the stock market was plummeting, but people didn't know the depths of it, like how many

jobs we were losing per month and so forth. And I think I might have done a better job in preparing people so they kind of knew what was coming. And that would have helped explain why we needed to pass the Recovery Act or why we needed to invest in the auto industry. So I think we could have done a better job on that front than we did.

I think I would have closed Guantanamo on the first day. I didn't because at that time, as you all recall, we had a bipartisan agreement that it should be closed. The Republican—my Republican opponent had also said it should have been closed. And I thought that we had enough consensus there that we could do it in a more deliberate fashion. But the politics of it got tough, and people got scared by the rhetoric around it. And once that set in, then the path of least resistance was just to leave it open, even though it's not who we are as a country. It is used by terrorists around the world to help recruit jihadists. So instead, we've had to just chip away at it, year after year after year. But I think in that first couple of weeks, we could have done it quicker.

I was thinking maybe I should have told myself to start dying my hair now—[laughter]—before people noticed, because by the—a year in, it was too late. [Laughter] But that's—I'm just kidding. Michelle thinks I look distinguished. [Laughter]

Let me just say it has been wonderful to be with you. I'll leave you with this thought. As discouraging, sometimes, as the news is, and as certainly discouraging as the news out of Washington is sometimes, it really is important for us to understand how well positioned we are for the future.

I—we get White House interns in every 6 months: wonderful young people, really inspiring because they're so smart and clever and hard-working and idealistic. And I tell them, if there was a time in history where you would want to be born, and you were most likely to be healthy, have enough to eat, not be subject to violence, not be subject to discrimination, not be subject to sexual assault, not to be abused by your government, the time would actually be now. And that's hard to imagine

as—with all the terrible things that are happening around the world. But we've made enormous strides. We've made enormous progress.

When I was at that bridge down in Selma, and you think about, Reverend Moss, where we were 50 years ago and where we are now, as challenging, as troubling as what has happened in Ferguson and in Cleveland and in New York around some of those issues, as much progress as we have nevertheless made, when you think about our economy and the fact that we have the best universities and the best workers and we still have the best scientific establishment and the most innovative companies, we've got all the cards. We really do.

I mean, life is tough, and America has got problems, and they're hard to solve, and they're rarely solved overnight. And progress has never been a straight line, it's always zigged and zagged. And sometimes, you go sideways, and sometimes, you even go backwards. But our trajectory is towards greater fairness and more inclusiveness and more tolerance and more prosperity.

And I want people to feel encouraged by that. Because the longer I'm in this office, actually, the more proud I am of all the incredible things the American people do every single day. And our biggest enemy, I think, is this corrosive cynicism that tells us we can't do things. We—there is nothing this country cannot do. There's nothing Cleveland cannot do, and that's because of you.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:46 p.m. at the Global Center for Health Innovation. In his remarks, he referred to Connie Schultz, wife of Sen. Sherrod C. Brown; Don Moulthrop, chief executive officer, City Club of Cleveland; Otis Moss III, pastor, Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, IL; Reps. Peter A. Sessions and Martha Roby; Sen. Michael S. Lee; 2012 Republican Presidential nominee W. Mitt Romney; former Sen. Richard J. Santorum; Sen. Randal H. Paul; and Sen. John S. McCain III, in his capacity as the 2008 Republican Presidential nominee.