

for us, and that is the great influx of a great number of refugees, of people who are fearing for their lives and thus are leaving their home country.

Now, Germany, because of its history, is a country that shows great readiness to allow these people into its country to provide—to offer asylum for these people in dire need. And this is why this issue has very much moved into the focus of political debate and to the top of Germany's or Europe's political agenda these days.

We are quite aware of the fact that this is a major humanitarian challenge that we have to address. And my hope would be, my wish would be that a realization that that awareness does not only exist in Europe, but it's also something that is recognized in the United States of America. And I also have the sincere hope and wish that we may succeed in finding a solution on the one hand for these people who are fleeing their country, but also a solution that will allow us to tackle the problem at its root causes.

We are very close here, Mr. President. Every side is trying to do its bit. And I'm very grateful for the fact—[inaudible].

It is in this sense that I would like to convey the heartfelt greetings of the Federal Chancel-

lor to you, Mr. President. At the same time, I would like to thank you for the very kind words you have found as regards my personal life and myself as a person.

I still remember very fondly the joy felt by the German people when you for the first time came to pay a visit to my country. And that feeling of openness and joy was a feeling that was addressed to you, Mr. President, but it was also Germans' hearts going out to the American people and to the Nobel Peace Laureate, Barack Obama. And I think that that is an illustration of the fact that, despite the disagreements and misunderstandings that occur every once in a while—and I think that is only natural, in a way, amongst partners—we are very close. We are cooperating closely. We share common values. And I would wish to underline this here and now once again.

*President Obama.* Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:15 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, President Gauck referred to Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany. President Gauck spoke in German, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

## Remarks at the White House Summit on Worker Voice October 7, 2015

*The President.* Thank you so much. Well, everybody, please have a seat. Welcome to the White House. Let me offer at the outset the observation that Terrance could run for something. [Laughter] But we're so grateful to you for sharing your story, for everything you're doing to organize and inspire Americans across the country. You already recognized your mom Joann, another fast-food worker who's come up today from South Carolina. This is actually a remarkable moment: Neither of them make enough money to be able to afford to travel much, so this is the first time Terrance and Joann have seen each other in 10 years.

*Audience members.* Aww!

*The President.* Ten years apart because they don't earn enough to be able to just hop on a plane and visit each other.

The only problem I have with this story is that I am not sure that Joann is old enough to actually be Terrance's mom—[laughter]—based on how she's looking there. [Laughter]

Their story describes why we wanted to have this summit. Their story describes why workers need a voice. That's why our Secretary of Labor, Tom Perez, is here, and I should add, this is a pretty good way for the Labor Secretary to celebrate his birthday.

That's why we've got our outstanding leader in the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, here. And Senator Al Franken is here. And

Congressman Gregory Meeks is here. And Congresswoman Frederica Wilson is here. Because they have consistently been on the frontlines of championing the interests and the concerns of ordinary people who are working hard every single day and aren't asking for the world. All they're asking for is dignity and living wages and being able to take care of their families.

That's why we've got business and labor leaders here today, including the head of the AFL-CIO, Rich Trumka, who's been fighting these issues for decades. And that's why we've got workers and organizers and tech experts and so many others at this first-ever White House Summit on Workers' Voice.

And we convened this summit because we believe that this is a country where if we work hard, everybody should be able to get ahead; that the story of America has been each successive generation, getting an education where they could, working hard, saving, scrimping, making sure their kids get a little something better, hoping that at the end of the day, they're able to have a home of their own and be able to retire with some dignity and some respect, have basic benefits so that if they get sick, their families aren't bankrupt.

And make no mistake, Americans have been working harder than ever to bring this country back, to move it forward. After the worst crisis in my lifetime, back in 2007, we were able to take the unemployment rate that was around 10 all the way down to 5.1. Businesses were shedding about 800,000 jobs a month; today, they've created jobs for 67 straight months, three-point—13.2 million jobs in total.

When I took office, our auto industry was flatlining. Manufacturing had been in decline for a decade. Today, we're on pace to sell more American cars than in any year since 2001. And we've seen stronger job growth in manufacturing than any time since the 1990s. Our manufacturers are coming back; hundreds of thousands of good middle class jobs are being created.

When I took office, more than 15 percent of the American people were uninsured; today, only 9.2 percent are uninsured. And for the

first time on record, more than 90 percent of Americans have health insurance.

So we've made progress together. At a time when America's economy was flat on its back, we took some tough steps, not always popular, and we were able to get the economy growing again. But what I've said all along is that it wasn't enough just to get back to where we were before the financial crisis, before Lehman's, before the great recession. We had to tackle problems that had been building up for decades. And the central problem in our economy that had been building up for decades is the fact that while folks at the top did very well, ordinary workers were seeing their wages and their incomes flatlining.

And so the biggest challenge America continues to have is making sure that everybody in this new economy is participating; everybody who works hard is getting paid a decent wage with decent benefits, everybody has some basic economic security, and that the incredible productivity and wealth and innovation that has been a hallmark of the American economy is broadly based.

Wages need to rise more quickly. We need jobs to offer the kind of pay and benefits that let people raise a family. And in order to do that, workers need a voice. They need the voice and the leverage that guarantees this kind of middle class security.

And that's true now more than ever, during this time of rapid economic change. In recent years, we've seen an explosion of American innovation in the workforce. And because of technology, people are empowered and employers are empowered to create value and services in new ways.

We've got folks who are getting a paycheck driving for Uber or Lyft; people who are cleaning other people's houses through Handy; offering their skills on TaskRabbit. And so there's flexibility and autonomy and opportunity for workers. And millennials love working their phones—[laughter]—much quicker than I can. [Laughter] And all this is promising. But if the combination of globalization and automation undermines the capacity of the ordinary worker and the ordinary family to be able

to support themselves, if employers are able to use these factors to weaken workers' voices and give them a take-it-or-leave-it deal in which they don't have a chance to ever save for the kind of retirement they're looking for, if we don't refashion the social compact so that workers are able to be rewarded properly for the labor that they put in—people like Terrence—then we're going to have problems.

And it's not just going to be a problem for our politics, creating resentment and anxiety; it's going to be a problem for our economy because the history shows that when we do best as an economy, it's when workers have money in their pockets and they're able to buy goods and services. And they, in turn, create new demand and create new opportunity and create the kinds of markets that businesses can then take advantage of. That's just a fact.

So we've got to make sure that as we continue to move forward, both in this new on-demand economy and in the traditional economy as a whole, hard work guarantees some security. And that's what this summit is about: making sure that, as our economy continues to evolve, working Americans don't get lost in the shuffle. They can come together and they can win.

And we can do this. We've done it before. There was a time when we shifted from an agrarian economy to an industrial economy. And as we did, we made some adjustments to our arrangements. We said, you know what, we're going to offer everybody a free public education. We put together the New Deal, put in place systems like Social Security so that people had some basic protections in their golden years. We've put together labor laws that allowed for collective bargaining and banned child labor and allowed people to raise their voices and have some leverage in seeking a living wage.

Labor unions were often the driving force for progress: the 40-hour workweek, overtime pay, health insurance, retirement plans. The middle class itself was built on a union label. And that middle class that was built was the engine of our prosperity. And people at the top were doing just fine during these periods. We

had a lot of wealth. They—the top 1 percent, the top 10 percent still claimed the much larger share of income and wealth than everybody else, but it was in the context of a dynamic economy where wages and incomes were rising and most Americans felt stable and secure. The future looked brighter than the past.

Now, the economy is changing again. Technology has made it easier for companies to do more with less. They have world markets and the capacity to shift operations along the global supply chain.

Special interests argued that worker protections—including unions themselves—were to blame for middle class struggles, and unfortunately, too many folks bought into that. So union enrollment dropped precipitously. Oftentimes, companies became more sophisticated about keeping out unions. Workers, fearing that they might lose their job to offshoring or to moving down to a right-to-work State, felt less confident about negotiations.

Our culture as a whole started somehow extolling "greed is good," instead of, how do we work together to create a good society for everybody. Jobs began—as a consequence, began paying less, offering fewer benefits. And in recent years, we've seen more companies cut costs by hiring contractors and "perma-temps"—workers who are laboring side by side with full-time employees, but don't earn the same pay and benefits and job security. That's a bad phrase: "perma-temps." [Laughter]

The bottom line is, as union membership has fallen, inequality has risen. Union membership today is as low as it's been in about 80 years, since the thirties. And I believe that when folks attack unions, they're attacking the middle class. They're attacking cops, firefighters, teachers, nurses, service workers, public servants, autoworkers, plumbers, Americans who keep our streets safe and clean, who prepare our food, who clean up after us, who care for our aging parents.

And so, in today's economy, we should be making it easier, not harder, for folks to join a union. We should be strengthening our labor laws, not rolling them back. And for contractors or workers who can't join unions, we

should be finding new avenues for them to join together and advocate for themselves as well.

There's a saying that I think Lee Saunders—where is Lee? He's in here somewhere. I—there he is, right next to Rich over there. He likes to quote this: "If you're not at the table, you're on the menu." [Laughter] So we've got to get more working Americans to the table. But in order to do that, we have to acknowledge that you can't just keep on doing the same things thinking you're going to get a different outcome.

So part of the goal of this summit is to think creatively about how do we have a growing movement around the country to empower workers, to give them a sense of possibility. And we're seeing some of that happening here, some of the people who are representing here. Workers are organizing online at sites like co-worker.org to fight for new protections. Fast-food workers like Terrance are organizing for a raise with the support of the labor movement, and they've scored major victories in New York and L.A. We've got the National Domestic Workers Alliance—an organization of caregivers and housekeepers and nannies—who teamed up with care.com to make sure these workers got the support that they deserve. It's called the "Fair Care Pledge," and employers who take the pledge voluntarily agree to pay a fairer wage and set a clear example and provide for paid time off.

So we've got to look for new tools to bring people together, because in today's economy, it's not always going to be a situation where you just have one plant and one worker and one organizing drive; it's going to be workers who are not always on a single site. And we've got to find ways to make sure that they can express their solidarity in new ways. And that's where technology actually can help in the same ways that in the past sometimes it's hindered.

And then we need to engage businesses to lead the way as well, because there are businesses out there who are taking the high road and enlist their employees as partners in their shared future and understand that if they're investing in their employees and making them partners, that they'll actually do better, not

worse. They'll do better for shareholders. They'll do better for the community. They'll do better for America.

So you've got New Belgium Brewing that opens up its books and its strategic decision-making process to employees, and they also make really good beer. [Laughter] Kaiser Permanente works with 28 different unions to provide good pay and benefits, but also educational programs and avenues for employees to help improve quality and care throughout the company, which is why they're considered one of the premier health organizations in the country. Cumberland Farms convenience stores connects employees and leadership through apps and online platforms, and that leads to more input from employees and higher retention rates and better service.

So there are good things happening in America. But the question is: How do we scale up? How do we draw best practices and start changing mindsets? How do we help working folks and their families get ahead?

So we're here today to think about where do we go next. We've got to ask ourselves: What does the next generation of American jobs look like? How do we make sure those jobs reward hard work? At a time of shrinking union membership, but a growing number of digital tools for organizing, how do we make sure everyone who works hard has a chance to get ahead?

And how do we change public attitudes so that people who are frustrated feel empowered and not isolated? I think this is very important. We're entering into political season, and I won't make a big commentary on all of that. Obviously, I'm a proud Democrat—[laughter]—and I think we have better answers on a lot of these questions. But I will say this. The fear, the apprehension that can express itself in all kinds of ways—anti-immigration sentiment, resentment towards people who don't look exactly like you do, some of the anger that can express itself in not very productive economic policies—a lot of that is fed by just people feeling anxious about their futures and feeling alone and feeling like they've got no control and that nobody is listening.

And so part of what we've got to do is be—to tap into people who are frustrated about their job paying so little, people who are frustrated about industries that used to be in their town leaving, rightly frustrated about how hard it is to save for retirement, rightly frustrated about the fact that they can be replaced at any time with very little protections, and make sure that they understand there's a positive way to deal with these issues that will actually produce and deliver change and make things better, not just for them, but for all workers. We've got to help people feel connected and not isolated and hopeful, not just fearful.

And that requires that we do some self-examination about how we approach these problems. And I'll be honest with you, I mean, I've had conversations with our union leadership about this: You've got a whole millennial generation who knows they're not getting a good deal in the workplace, but don't consider joining unions, in part because the laws have been set up to make so hard to unionize, but also in part because they don't live in a town where everybody is working in the same plant, and there's a tradition of going to the assembly hall, and they haven't seen their parents or grandparents for generations participating in joining in same ways. And they connect, but they connect in different ways. And we've got to adapt to that: try to find new ways of bringing people in.

So that's why you're all here today to come up with some answers. I've got ideas, but this is a hard problem, and it's going to require creativity and effort from all of us. And we've got leaders from labor, business, and government; we've got some of the brightest minds in organizing and economics; and we've got folks like Terrance and his mom Joann, some of the hardest working Americans in the country. So you are in charge for the day. I'm eager to hear your ideas and your solutions. I know there are going to be some breakout sessions.

I'm going to come back and have a town hall and hopefully be able to hear some of the discussion that's been taking place. But I do want to start the discussion by just offering a set of common, set principles—commonsense principles for what it means to work in America.

First, if you work hard in America, you should earn enough money to support your family. And if you're working two jobs, like Terrance, then your family should never have to go to bed hungry.

Second, if you work hard in America, you should earn decent benefits. And that means access to the two bedrock sources of lifelong security, and that is affordable health coverage and retirement savings.

Third, if you work hard in America, you should have the right to a safe workplace. And if you get hurt on the job or become disabled or unemployed, you should still be able to keep food on the table.

Fourth, if you work hard in America, you should be able to take care of those you love, which means having sick leave and parental leave and affordable childcare and predictable schedules that give your family some stability.

Fifth, if you work hard in America, you should have a pathway to the education and training you need to grow your skills and earn raises and promotions and the chance to get ahead.

And finally, if you work hard in America, you should have the freedom to decide for yourself—without fear or interference—if you want to join with others to advocate for yourself in the workplace, whether that's through a union or any other means. And these are core principles that helped build this country.

So I—I'm sure there are going to be a lot of ideas coming out of these discussions, but these are the guideposts that we need to stay focused on: good pay, benefits, workplace safety, work-family balance, skills training, the freedom to organize. That's what unions secured for us. That's what we have to secure for the next generation of workers.

We've done a lot of work on these issues: extending overtime protections, helping workers collect fair pay that they've earned, ensuring paid sick leave for Federal contractors. Seventeen States and 30 cities and counties so far have answered my call to raise the minimum wage.

There are few policies that have done more to provide Americans with financial security

than Obamacare. Because insurance plans on the new Federal marketplace are affordable and portable, folks now have the power and peace of mind to switch jobs or start a new business or make a living in the on-demand economy without worrying about whether they're going to get sick.

So we're going to continue to do everything in our power to help working families get ahead. And we're going to still have to worry about short-term politics even as we try to shift long-term perspectives here. Congress has to do its job right now and pass a budget that strengthens protections for America's workers and invests in the education and job training that prepares our workforce for the future. And they need to strengthen paid leave and expanded childcare and raise the minimum wage for Americans across this country. They should pass the WAGE Act, a bill that cracks down on employers who violate labor laws and that makes it easier for workers to organize.

And—but—and I'll end on this point. You can't wait for Congress. [Laughter] I'm just—no, no, I'm just saying. The—we've got incredible champions like Nancy Pelosi and the Members of Congress who are here, but this is a fight on the ground. We've got to change an attitude and mindset that says there's nothing we can do, or giving workers more voice means inefficiency and we won't be competitive, or suggests that there's a contradiction between economic growth and decent wages, or suggests that we should have a race to the bottom with other countries, or suggests that somehow the current arrangements in which a growing amount of what we produce in this country go-

ing to the top .001 percent is in the natural order of things and is somehow fair and just.

And we—those are attitudes that we have to change. And that's going to happen on the ground. And that will then reflect itself in politics, and that will reflect itself in new laws being passed.

But we've got to give people examples and models and work where we can to make a difference where we can. And that will give people confidence and hope and can start triggering the kind of broader movement that channels people's anxieties and frustrations in ways that are good for our future.

So I want to hear from you about the challenges you're facing right now, the successes you've earned, the ideas you have to strengthen workers' voices across the country. I will come back later this afternoon. I don't expect you to come up with all the answers today—[laughter]—but I do want to make sure, we're asking the right questions and that we produce a set of relationships and workstreams to really get this going.

If we do that, then we're going to be able to keep America a place where, when you work hard, you can get ahead, and more importantly, you can see your kids and your grandkids get ahead.

All right? Thanks, everybody. I'll see you this afternoon. Thank you. See you guys there.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:47 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Kansas City, MO, resident Terrence Wise, who introduced the President, and his mother Joann Wise; and Lee Saunders, president, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

## Remarks in a Question-and-Answer Session at the White House Summit on Worker Voice October 7, 2015

*Coworker.org* Cofounder and Codirector Michelle Miller. Thank you, Mr. President. It's an honor to be here at the White House Summit for Worker Voice. And we're really excited to share with you what we've learned today from everybody.

*The President.* Well, first of all, I hope everybody has had a good time, and I hope the conversations have been useful. I know that my team that has participated has been incredibly excited and inspired by all the energy and insight and stories that people have told throughout the day.