

lived through Bloody Sunday, it made you optimistic about a future. It was powerful to see the fathers and the mothers of the movement in this constant interaction, understanding that each successive generation has to take the baton and move us forward.

And what's so inspiring about these young people and their generation is that they don't see Black history as a relic; it's not something to study in a book. They don't see themselves as distant from that history; they are participants, making history. It's alive; it's something that we have the power and the responsibility to shape and to wield.

The civil rights movement grew out of church basements and word of mouth and drew strength from freedom songs and the power of young people's examples. And thanks to technology and social media, today's leaders are building a new, inclusive movement that's mobilizing people of all backgrounds to stand up for change, from equal opportunity in education to a smarter criminal justice system, one that's more effective in keeping us safe, but also makes sure that everybody is treated fairly under the law.

So I want to give a special shout-out to young people here today and tell them we want them to continue doing what they're doing.

And that's the thing about our democracy. It takes all of us. It's important that we have responsive elected officials. Supreme Court appointments are important. But ultimately, everything comes down to the constant perseverance, the courage, the tenacity, the vision of citizens like you, making sure not only you exercise your right to vote, but that in between elections you are part of a constant movement in your local communities or at a national level

or at an international level to bring about the kind of change from which all of us in this room have benefited because of the labors of somebody who came before us.

America is a nation that is a constant work in progress. That's why we are exceptional. We don't stop. There's a gap—there always will be—between who we are and the “perfect Union,” that ideal that we see. But what makes us exceptional, what makes us Americans, is that we fight wars and pass laws and we march and we organize unions and we stage protests, and that gap gets smaller over time. And it's that effort to form a more perfect Union that marks us as a people.

As long as we keep at it, as long as we don't get discouraged, as long as we are out there fighting the good fight not just on 1 day or 1 month, but every single day, and every single month, I have no doubt that we're going to live up to the promise of our founding ideals and that all these young children who are standing in front, no matter who they are or where they come from, they're going to have the opportunity to achieve their dreams.

Thank you, everybody. God bless you. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:51 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Debbie Allen, founder, Debbie Allen Dance Academy; Judith Jamison, artistic director emerita, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater; Cordy Tindell “C.T.” Vivian, founder, C.T. Vivian Leadership Institute; Stephen A. Green, national director, NAACP Youth and College Division; and Brittany Packnett, executive director, Teach For America St. Louis.

Remarks at a Democratic Governors Association Meeting February 19, 2016

The President. Well, I want to welcome back the Democratic Governors to the White House. It's wonderful to see you.

Before I get started, a couple of orders of business. First of all, I want to recognize that

Governor Hickenlooper of Colorado has had a very good year. [*Laughter*] First, he gets married; then, the Broncos win the Super Bowl. [*Laughter*] Now he gets to spend the weekend with all of you. [*Laughter*] He's got

the trifecta. But congratulations. Congratulations.

I should note that Governor Shumlin also got married. So something is in the water.

Governor Peter E. Shumlin of Vermont. Thank you.

The President. But congratulations to both of you. And you obviously are doing what Joe and I did, which is marrying up. [Laughter]

Gov. Shumlin. This is very true, very true.

The President. It is great to see all of you. I'm just going to make some brief remarks at the top because this is designed to be a conversation. I want to thank, first of all, every single one of you for all that you do around the country. As Democrats, we believe that every American should have the opportunity to work for a good wage and benefits, and to be able to advance themselves and their families. And you've helped our businesses create over 14 million new jobs over the past 6 years. You've helped cut the unemployment rate down from 10 percent, down to 4.9 percent.

As the Affordable Care Act has taken effect, nearly 18 million Americans have gained health care coverage. And that's thanks to strong efforts by all of you. And I very much appreciate all of that.

We have been able to work at the ground level on all the issues that people care deeply about. For example, Governor Shumlin is about to sign Vermont's first paid sick days leave law. And we are very proud of him for that.

In Minnesota, Governor Dayton has proposed providing 6 weeks of paid parental leave for State employees. So from raising the minimum wage to expanding early childhood education, to expanding how we provide computer science education to our kids, to helping workers retrain for the jobs of the future, to helping them plan for retirement, your States have been leading the charge for change.

There is one thing in particular I'm going to make a focus this year, and that's protecting everybody's right to vote. As I said when I visited my old State capital of Springfield, Illinois, the job of our democracy is to make it easier,

not make it harder for our citizens to be able to vote. And we need to be modernizing voting to reflect the way that people live today.

In Illinois, a new law goes into effect this year that expands early voting, and that's going to allow folks to register and vote on election day. Illinois was following the good lead of the Browns: Governor Kate Brown of Oregon and Governor Jerry Brown in California. Last year, their States became the first States to adopt automatic voter registration. In Oregon alone, they're hoping to register 300,000 voters this year. And so I'd encourage your steps—to take a look at the proposals that they've put forward.

This is about more than just creating economic opportunity, it is about preserving the rights and opportunities of generations of Americans that have fought so hard to secure and broaden our democracy. It's about making democracy as good as it can be. So I just want to urge all of you to make sure that folks aren't being disenfranchised and that they're able to participate in the democracy the way our Founders intended.

And with that, what I'd like to do is to turn it over to Governor Malloy, and then, we're going to just start opening up for questions. But again, thanks for all the work you do. And we're really proud to be partners with you. And my hope is, is that Jerry is getting a lot of phone calls from you because we don't want him just sitting around doing nothing around here. [Laughter] And I know as a former mayor, he appreciates the fact that unlike Washington, where sometimes rhetoric and ideology get in the way of getting stuff done, when you're a Governor, people expect you to actually put ideology aside and deliver the goods. And all of you have been doing that. So thank you.

All right, thanks, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:19 p.m. in Room 350 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Vice President Joe Biden; and Gov. Dannel P. Malloy of Connecticut.