

that the only way we can build consensus, the only way that we can move forward as a country, the only way we can help the world mend itself is by agreeing on a baseline of facts when it comes to the challenges that confront us all.

So this night is a testament to all of you who have devoted your lives to that idea, who push to shine a light on the truth every single day. So I want to close my final White House Correspondents' dinner by just saying thank you. I'm very proud of what you've done. It has been an honor and a privilege to work side by side with you to strengthen our democracy.

And with that, I just have two more words to say: Obama out. [*Laughter*]

[*The President performed a "mike drop," intentionally dropping his microphone to the floor.*]

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:05 p.m. at the Capital Hilton hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Jeff Mason, vice president and incoming president, White House Correspondents' Association; former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Sen. Bernard Sanders, in their capacity as Democratic Presidential candidates; Prime Minister Justin P.J.

Trudeau of Canada; Supreme Court Associate Justice-designate Merrick B. Garland; Prince George of Cambridge, son of Prince William and Catherine, Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, Queen Elizabeth II, and Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom; Reinhold R. "Reince" Priebus, chairman, Republican National Committee; comedian Larry Wilmore, in his capacity as host of Comedy Central's "The Nightly Show," and his parents Larry and Betty Wilmore; Jon Stewart, former host, and Trevor Noah, host, Comedy Central's "The Daily Show"; actors Mark Ruffalo, Liev Schreiber, and Rachel McAdams, who portrayed Boston Globe reporters in the film "Spotlight," about the Boston Globe's investigation into the Catholic Church's sexual abuse scandal; model and television personality Kendall Jenner; actor Helen Mirren; former Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg of New York City; Carol E. Lee, president, White House Correspondents' Association; Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany; reporters Sacha Pfeiffer, Michael Rezendes, Walter Robinson, Matt Carroll, and Benjamin C. Bradlee, Jr., who were portrayed in the film "Spotlight"; and Jason Rezaian, reporter, Washington Post, who was released from detention in Iran in January.

Remarks Honoring the 2016 National Teacher of the Year and State Teachers of the Year May 3, 2016

The President. Thank you. Well, welcome to the White House. And thank you, Jahana, for that wonderful introduction. Everybody, please give the National Teacher of the Year a big round of applause. It's a little surprising that she got this award because you can tell she's a little shy—[*laughter*]—and lacks enthusiasm. [*Laughter*] And yet somehow, she seems to be performing pretty well in the classroom. [*Laughter*] Look at that smile.

So, for 7 years, I've stood in the White House with America's finest public servants and private-sector innovators and our best advocates and our best athletes and our best artists, and I have to tell you there are few mo-

ments that make me prouder than this event when I stand alongside our Nation's best educators. You know, I—[*applause*].

Every year on this day, we say publicly as a country what we should be eager to say every day of the year, and that is, "Thank you." That's what this event is about. That's why it's one of my favorites. It's a good day with all of you guys here in Washington to say thank you for the extraordinary work that teachers do all across the country. It's also, I guess, a pretty good day for substitute teachers because we've got a lot of folks—[*laughter*]—we've got a lot of folks playing hooky today. [*Laughter*] This is a school day. [*Laughter*]

National Teacher of the Year Jahana Hayes.
This is a learning opportunity. [Laughter]

The President. It's a field trip.

Audience members. Yes!

The President. Now, among our country's best educators happens to be our Secretary of Education, Dr. John King, Jr. John is someone who, like Jahana, found refuge in school as a youngster. And he found role models in the classroom at a time when he needed them most. And that experience instilled in him the empathy that makes him such a powerful voice for students and for teachers and for principals and superintendents and educators all across the country.

I also want to acknowledge Jahana's Senator from Connecticut, Chris Murphy. He's around here somewhere. There he is. He's proud of you too.

I want to welcome her fellow Teachers of the Year from all 50 States, DC, and our Territories. And we want to welcome the hundreds of distinguished educators from all across the country that joined us this afternoon. So thank you.

I figured this is the last time I was going to do this, so I wanted to invite as many of you as possible, because you are people who are inspiring at every grade level, who are opening minds to math and music; to basic literacy, but also classic literature; to social studies and science, Spanish and special education.

In their daily lives, the men and women who teach our children fulfill the promise of a nation that's always looking forward, that believes each generation has a responsibility to help the next in building this great country of ours and making the world a better place.

President Kennedy said, "Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education." Now, the school where Jahana teaches happens to bear President Kennedy's name. And it's fitting then that the perspective, the approach that she brings to the classroom suits the philosophy that he articulated.

This is what Jahana said about how she approaches her responsibility: "It doesn't matter how bright a student is or where they rank in a class or what colleges they have been accepted

to if they do nothing with their gift to improve the human condition." And Jahana cares about the example she sets as much as the exams that she scores.

[At this point, Ms. Hayes began to applaud energetically.]

All right, you just need to settle down. [Laughter] This is what makes her a great teacher. You can't be great if you're not enthusiastic. [Laughter] You've got to love what you do, and she loves what she does.

And what's remarkable about Jahana's natural talent in the classroom is that when she was growing up in Waterbury, Connecticut, being a teacher was the furthest thing from her mind. In fact, there were times where she didn't even want to be a student.

No one in Jahana's family had gone to college. No one at home particularly encouraged education. She lived in a community full of poverty and violence, high crime and low expectations. And drugs were more accessible than degrees. As a teenager, Jahana became pregnant and wanted to drop out of school. But her teachers saw something. They saw something in her. And they gave her an even greater challenge, and that was to dream bigger and to imagine a better life. And they made her believe she was college material and that she had the special gift to improve not only her own condition, but those around her.

And today, Jahana's principal at Kennedy High says she gets through to her students precisely because she remembers what it's like to be one of them. And she doesn't forget that everyone in her class brings their own different and sometimes difficult circumstances. And she meets them where they are. And she sees a grace in them, and she sees a possibility in them. And because she sees it, they start seeing it.

And that's what makes Jahana more than a teacher; she's a counselor and a confidant. That's how a woman who became a teenage mom is now a mentor to high schoolers in the same city where she grew up.

And meanwhile, outside of the classroom, Jahana has been a leader in the afterschool

theater program. She put together a “Teen Idol” singing show. [Laughter] She won the school’s “Dancing With the Stars” competition. [Laughter] I wish I had met you before I started tangoing in Argentina. [Laughter] Could have given me some tips.

And this is something that I think is particularly remarkable: Jahana inspires her students to give back. I think she understands that actually sometimes the less you have, the more valuable it is to see yourself giving, because that shows you the power and the influence that you can bring to bear on the world around you.

One year, she had been assigned to a group that seemed unmotivated, so she found out what was distracting them. Seven students in one class had recently lost a parent to cancer. So she organized a Relay for Life team through the American Cancer Society, and it became an annual event.

Last year, when Jahana went online to register her team, she noticed not 1, not 2, but 14 teams led by former students had already signed up. She organized her students to walk for autism, to feed the homeless, to donate clothes, to clean neighborhoods, and even to register voters. And so it takes a unique leader to get students who don’t have a lot to give of themselves. But because Jahana understood those kids, she knew not to set low expectations, but to set high ones and to say to them, you can make a difference.

And that’s the kind of leader our Teacher of the Year is. She knows that if students learn their worth, then the class rank and the college acceptances and the exam scores will follow.

Now, if there’s one thing Jahana wishes she had in school, it was more teachers who looked like her, as she already mentioned. And so she wrote and won a State grant to inspire more students to become teachers, but especially to recruit more Black and Latino teachers in her district. And that’s important.

And not one of the teachers standing behind me or in front of our children’s classrooms chose this profession because they were promised a big payday or a short workday. [Laughter] Although, you all do need to be paid bet-

ter. That I believe. But the main reason teachers do what they do is because they love kids. They love our kids. And yes, we should pay teachers more because what they do is invaluable and essential. And the teachers here, though, will tell you that what would be most helpful, in addition to a little financial relief, would be people understanding how important the work you do is and to appreciate it and not take it for granted.

And so part of the reason this event is so important is for us to be able to send a message to future generations of teachers, to talented young people all across the country to understand this is a dream job; that this is an area where you will have more influence potentially than any other profession that you go into.

Audience member. Say it again! [Laughter]

The President. This is a profession where you have the potential to make more of a difference than just about anything you can go into.

So, over the past 7 years, we’ve looked at every element of our education system with an eye towards boosting the teaching profession. And thanks to our educators and the opinions you’ve voiced and the leadership that you’ve shown, we’ve come a long way since we came into office.

One of the first things we did, in the middle of the worst economic crisis in generations, when States and cities were slashing budgets, was to keep more than 300,000 educators in our kids’ classrooms. That was part of the Recovery Act.

We’ve taken the first steps towards making sure every young person in America gets the best start possible. And keep in mind that in 2009, when I started here, only 38 States had their own preschool programs. Today, all but four have. We’ve expanded Head Start programs for tens of thousands of kids who need it.

We made turning around America’s low-performing schools a national priority. The year before I took office, a quarter of our high school students didn’t graduate on time. More than a million didn’t finish high school at all. And today, high school graduations rates have never been higher, dropout rates have gone

down. We're transforming hundreds of America's lowest performing schools.

We're also bringing new technology and digital tools to our classrooms to modernize and personalize learning. Three years ago, less than a third of all school districts could access high-speed Internet, and a lot of low-income communities were left behind. Today, 20 million more students and most of our school districts have fast broadband and wireless in the classroom. And by 2018, we're going to make sure that we reach the goal I set: 99 percent of our students will have high-speed Internet.

We're making remarkable progress towards my pledge to train 100,000 STEM teachers by 2021 thanks to the great work of "10,000K [100K]^o in 10," which, with new commitments to prepare 70,000 more teachers, I want to just announce today, this is a goal that we are going to achieve on time. We're on our way.

And we unleashed a Race to the Top, convincing every State to raise its standards so students are prepared for success in college and for future careers. And we listened to parents who wanted subjects like computer science taught in our schools. And we listened to teachers who have shown why cookie-cutter solutions don't always work. We're empowering States and communities to set their own standards for progress with accountability. And because nobody thinks our students need to spend more time filling in bubbles on standardized tests, we're starting to give educators like those behind me the flexibility to spend more time teaching creatively than they're spending teaching to a test.

Now, that doesn't mean that all our problems are solved. You'd know it better than I do. In too many States, we are underfunding public education. And it is the job of State legislators and of Governors to recognize that the well-being of their State and their communities and their families and their kids requires them to step up. In too many school districts, we still have schools that, despite great efforts by a lot of great teachers, are still not getting our kids prepared the way they need to be pre-

pared. And we've got to be willing to be honest when something is not working and say, all right, let's try something different. And sometimes, we won't necessarily get it right the first time.

But the reason I think—I want to bring this up. This wasn't in my prepared remarks—[laughter]—but I think it's important. So often now, the debate swings back and forth. You've got some folks who say resources and money don't make a difference, and the problem is all the teachers' unions. And they want to break up the schools, and they think vouchers are all the answer, or some other approach. And then, on the other side, you've got folks who just know that argument is wrong, but too often it sounds like it's just a defense of the status quo.

And the fact of the matter is, is that we do have to do better in too many of our schools. We need more teachers like this in all of you. We've got to make the profession more attractive. We do have to have accountability in the classroom. That doesn't mean forcing you to teach to the test, but we've got to come up with measures that are meaningful so that if somebody doesn't have the skills that Jahana or these other teachers have, that they can start developing it and we know what to look for. We've got to make sure that we're setting our sights high.

And although I am very proud of the work that we've done, I know we're not there yet. And we may have replaced No Child Left Behind, which was a relief for a lot of folks, but the absence of something that wasn't working as well as it should is not the presence of the kind of work that remains to be done.

So, in our country, it's a little harder than in some other countries, because we've got diverse populations, and we've got folks coming from different backgrounds and starting off in tougher circumstances. But our Teacher of the Year here stands as proof that you can't set expectations high enough for our kids. There's magic in those kids. We just have to find it. We have to unleash it. We have to nurture it. We have to support it. We have to love them. And

^o White House correction.

then, we have to tell them precisely because we love you, you're going to work harder—[laughter]—and you're going to do better. And we're going to stay on you.

That's what we have to do. And we can't just leave it to the teachers, because if our notion is we drop off our kids and then the teacher is doing everything, and then our job is done, it's not going to work.

So this is why my administration launched Teach To Lead, to give teachers a greater voice in the policies that affect them every day.

And I'm going to close by just talking about a letter I received at the beginning of this school year from a teacher in Central Virginia named Danny Abell.

Audience member. Let's hear it!

The President. There's Danny. That's Danny. There's a reason why he got a good spot—[laughter]—because he knew I was going to talk about him. So Danny asked his students if any of them wanted to be a teacher when they grew up. And no one raised their hands. And that worried him. So he wrote me to ask what I'd say if one of my daughters told me she wanted to become a teacher. And I mean this—this is the God's honest truth—if Sasha or Malia wanted to be teachers, I will tell them,

I could not be prouder of what you've done. And I'd tell them to be the kind of teachers who don't just show her students how to get the correct answer, but how to be curious about the world and how to care for the people around her and how to analyze facts and evidence and how to tell stories, and how to believe in their ability to shape their own destiny.

In other words, I'd tell her to be like Jahana and to be like each of the educators behind us here today and the kinds of teachers that you see in classrooms in every State and every Territory and the District of Columbia. I'm so proud of all of you for the high standards you set for your students, for your fellow teachers. Thank you for making our Nation stronger.

And now, Jahana, please join me to accept this award from America's educators—the crystal apple—as the National Teacher of the Year.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:35 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Robert A. Johnston, principal, John F. Kennedy High School in Waterbury, CT; and Daniel Abell, teacher, Midlothian High School in Midlothian, VA.

Statement on Education Reform

May 3, 2016

When we came into office at the height of the worst recession in generations, we knew a key to creating true middle class security would be preparing the next generation to compete in the global economy. Thanks to the hard work of our teachers, students, parents, and State and local leaders, that commitment is paying off in new opportunities for our communities and our country.

Today, on National Teacher Appreciation Day, we say thank you to the leaders in our classrooms and reaffirm our shared belief that all children, no matter where they live or what they look like, can grow up to be whatever they want. A world-class education is the single most important factor in making that possible. It determines not just whether our children

can compete for the best jobs, but whether America can outcompete other countries.

At the beginning of my Administration, we set an ambitious goal to once again lead the world in our share of college graduates. By reforming our education system from cradle to career, and with the help of a newly announced \$100 million down payment to help expand free community college programs and connect college graduates to in-demand jobs, we're on our way to realizing that goal.

We're also proud that high school graduation rates are at an alltime high and dropout rates are at historic lows. Across the board, we're raising expectations for everyone from the Congress to the classroom—but we didn't