

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks at the White House Science Fair

February 7, 2012

Thank you, everybody. Everybody, have a seat. Well, welcome to the White House science fair. It is—I just spent some time checking out some of the projects that were brought here today, and I've got to say, this is fun. It's not every day that you have robots running all over your house. [*Laughter*] I am trying to figure out how you got through the metal detectors. I also shot a marshmallow through an air gun, which was very exciting. [*Laughter*]

Science is what got several of our guests where they are today, so I just want to make a couple of introductions. We've got a real-life astronaut and the head of NASA, Charles Bolden, in the house. We have the Administrator of the EPA; Lisa Jackson is here. The Director of the National Science Foundation, Subra Suresh, is here. My science—there's Subra, over here—my science adviser, John Holdren, is in the house. We've got a couple of people who've dedicated themselves to making science cool for young people. We've got Neil deGrasse Tyson and Bill Nye the Science Guy.

Now, it is fitting that this year's fair is happening just 2 days after the Super Bowl. I want to congratulate the New York Giants and all their fans. I just talked to Coach Coughlin; I'm looking forward to having the Giants here at the White House so we can celebrate their achievements. But what I've also said—I've said this many times—is if we are recognizing athletic achievement, then we should also be recognizing academic achievement and science achievement. If we invite the team that wins the Super Bowl to the White House, then we need to invite some science fair winners to the White House as well.

Now I'm going to talk about how great all of you are in a second. But before I do, I want to give the parents a big round of applause, because they work hard to help you succeed, and I know this is their day. They're really proud of you. As a parent, I know that seeing your kids do extraordinary things is—brings the greatest happiness that a parent can have. So congratulations to all the parents of all these incredible young people.

But parents aren't the only ones who helped you get this far. Every one of you can think of a teacher, or maybe a couple of teachers, without whom you would not be here. So I want you to promise that the next time you see those teachers, that you give them a big thank you, not just for yourselves, but also from me. Because teachers matter, they deserve our support, and I want to make sure that we are constantly lifting up how important teachers are to making sure that not only you succeed, but this country succeeds. So give teachers a big round of applause.

Now, as I was walking around the science fair, I was thinking back to when I was your age. And basically, you guys put me to shame. [*Laughter*] What impresses me so much is not just how smart you are, but it's the fact that you recognize you've got a responsibility to use your talents in service of something bigger than yourselves.

Some of you, that means developing new products that will change the way we live. So Hayley Hoverter—where's Hayley? There she is, right over here—invented a new type of sugar packet that dissolves in hot water. It's flavorless, it's colorless, and potentially could save up to 2 million pounds of trash each year—and that's just at Starbucks. [*Laughter*] So MasterCard has already awarded her \$10,000 to help turn her idea into a business.

Some of you are here because you saw a problem in your community and you're trying to do something to solve it. Benjamin Hylak—where's Benjamin? There's Benjamin right here—was worried that folks at his grandmother's senior center were getting lonely. So he built a robot with a monitor and a video camera, so it's like a moving Skype. And it moves around the center, and it allows seniors to talk to their kids and their grandkids, even when they can't visit in person. So inventions like Benjamin's could make life better for millions of families.

For some of you, the journey you took to get here is just as inspiring as the work that you brought with you today. There's a rocketry team from Presidio, Texas—where's my team here? Where are you? Stand up, guys. Stand up. This is part of the fourth-poorest school district in the State of Texas. And I was told that teachers cooked food to sell after church, supporters drove 200 miles to pick up donuts for bake sales, they even raffled off a goat—[laughter]—is that right? Just so they could raise enough money for the rocketry team to compete. And the majority of the kids at the school are ESL, English as a second language. And the presentation they made could not make you prouder. So way to go.

There's a group of young engineers from Paul Robeson-Malcolm X Academy. And nobody needs to tell them the kinds of challenges that Detroit still faces. Where's my team from Detroit? In the house—there they are. Stand up. They believe in their city, and they're coming up with new ideas to keep Detroit's comeback going.

And there's Samantha Garvey—where's Samantha? Just saw Samantha. There she is. Stand up, Samantha. Samantha spent years studying mussel populations in the Long Island Sound. And when she learned that she was a semifinalist for the Intel Science Talent Search—when she found this out—her family was living in a homeless shelter, so think about what she's overcome. She wants to, by the way, work maybe for NOAA or EPA. So this is Dr. Lubchenco; she's the head of NOAA. [Laughter] Lisa Jackson, right there, head of EPA. [Laughter] You might just want to hook up with them before you leave. [Laughter]

The young people I met today, the young people behind me—you guys inspire me. It's young people like you that make me so confident that America's best days are still to come. When you work and study and excel at what you're doing in math and science, when you compete in something like this, you're not just trying to win a prize today. You're getting America in shape to win the future. You're making sure we have the best, smartest, most skilled workers in the world, so that the jobs and industries of tomorrow take root right here. You're making sure we'll always be home to the most creative entrepreneurs, the most advanced science labs and universities. You're making sure America will win the race to the future.

So as an American, I'm proud of you. As your President, I think we need to make sure your success stories are happening all across the country.

And that's why when I took office, I called for an all-hands-on-deck approach to science, math, technology, and engineering. Let's train more teachers. Let's get more kids studying these subjects. Let's make sure these fields get the respect and attention that they deserve.

But it's not just a Government effort. I'm happy to say that the private sector has answered that call as well. They understand how important it is to their future. So today, led by the Carnegie Corporation, a group of businesses and foundations is announcing a \$22 million fund to help train 100,000 new science and math teachers. A coalition of more than 100 CEOs is expanding innovative math and science programs to 130 sites across the country. And other companies are partnering from—everybody from Will.i.am to Dean Kamen—to make sure we

celebrate young scientists and inventors and engineers, not just at the White House, but in every city and every town all across America.

And many of these leaders are here today, and I want to thank them for doing their part. We're going to do everything we can to partner to help you succeed in your projects. And I'm proud to announce that the budget I unveil next week will include programs to help prepare new math and science teachers and to meet an ambitious goal, which is 1 million more American graduates in science, technology, engineering, and math over the next 10 years. That is a goal we can achieve. That's a goal we can achieve.

Now, in a lot of ways, today is a celebration of the new. But the belief that we belong on the cutting edge of innovation—that's an idea as old as America itself. I mean, we're a nation of tinkerers and dreamers and believers in a better tomorrow. You think about our Founding Fathers—they were all out there doing experiments. And folks like Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, they were constantly curious about the world around them and trying to figure out how can we help shape that environment so that people's lives are better.

It's in our DNA. We know that innovation has helped each generation pass down that basic American promise, which is no matter who you are, no matter where you come from, you can make it if you try. So there's nothing more important than keeping that promise alive for the next generation. There's no priority I have that's higher than President—as President than this.

And I can't think of a better way to spend a morning than with the young people who are here doing their part and creating some unbelievable stuff in the process. So I'm proud of you. I want you to keep up your good work.

I'm going to make a special plea to the press—not just the folks who are here, but also your editors—give this some attention. I mean, this is the kind of stuff, what these young people are doing, that's going to make a bigger difference in the life of our country over the long term than just about anything. And it doesn't belong just on the back pages of a newspaper; we've got to lift this up. We've got to emphasize how important this is and recognize these incredible young people who are doing things that I couldn't even imagine thinking about at fifth grade or eighth grade or in high school.

And so pay attention to this. This is important. This is what's going to make a difference in this country over the long haul. This is what inspires me and gets me up every day. This is what we should be focusing on in our public debates.

And as for all the folks who are here, don't let your robots wander off anywhere.
[Laughter] All right?

Thank you, everybody. Appreciate it. Congratulations.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:53 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Neil deGrasse Tyson, director, Hayden Planetarium; William S. Nye, television personality and executive director of the Planetary Society; Tom Coughlin, head coach, National Football League's New York Giants; science fair student participants Janet Nieto, Gwynelle Condino, and Ana Karen of Presidio, TX, and Lucas C. Beal, Jayla M. Dogan, and Ashley C. Thomas of Detroit, MI; entertainer William J. "Will.i.am" Adams, Jr.; and Dean Kamen, founder and president, DEKA Research and Development Corporation.

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Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Adams, William J. "Will.i.am," Jr.; Beal, Lucas C.; Bolden, Charles F.; Condino, Gwynelle; Coughlin, Tom; Dogan, Jayla M.; Garvey, Samantha; Holdren, John; Hoverter, Hayley; Hylak, Benjamin; Jackson, Lisa P.; Kamen, Dean L.; Karen, Ana; Lubcheno, Jane; Nieto, Janet; Nye, William S.; Suresh, Subra; Thomas, Ashley C.; Tyson, Neil deGrasse.

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