

Remarks to the National Governors Association

February 24, 2014

Thank you so much. Everybody, please have a seat.

Welcome to the White House. I know that you've already been doing a lot of work, and I'm glad to be able to come here and engage in a dialogue with all of you. I want to thank Mary and John for their leadership at the NGA. I want to thank my outstanding Vice President, Joe Biden, who is very excited, I think, about the jobs initiative and is going to be—the job training initiative and, I think, is going to be doing a great job on that.

Michelle and I had a wonderful time hosting you guys last night, and I hope all the spouses enjoyed it. And I know Alex enjoyed it. [*Laughter*] One good thing about living here is that you can make all the noise you want and nobody is going to complain. [*Laughter*] And I enjoyed watching some of you with your eyes on higher office size up the drapes—[*laughter*]—and each other.

We don't have a lot of time today, so I want to be very brief, go straight to Q&A and discussion. We're at a moment when our economy is growing; our businesses have now created over 8.5 million new jobs over the past 4 years. But as I've said several times, the trends that have battered the middle class for a couple of decades now are still there and still have to be addressed. Those at the top are doing very well. Ordinary families still feeling squeezed. Too many Americans are working harder than ever and just barely getting by.

And reversing these trends are going to require us to work together around what I'm calling an opportunity agenda based on four things: number one, more good jobs that pay good wages; number two, training more Americans to be able to take the jobs that are out there right now and the jobs that are created; number three, guaranteeing access to a world-class education for every American child all across our 50 States and our Territories; and making sure that hard work pays off, with wages that you can live on, savings that you can retire on, health insurance that you can count on.

And all of this is going to take some action. So far, just in the past few weeks, I've acted to lift the wages of workers who work for Federal contractors to pay their—make sure their employees are getting paid at least \$10.10 an hour. We've ordered an across-the-board reform of our job training programs, much of it aligned with some of the work that Mary has done during her tenure as head of the NGA. We directed our Treasury to create a new way for Americans to start saving for retirement. We've been able to rally America's business leaders to help more of the long-term unemployed find work and to help us make sure that all of our kids have access to high-speed Internet and high-tech learning tools in the classroom.

The point is, this has to be a year of action. And I'm eager to work with Congress wherever I can. My hope is, is that despite this being an election year, that there will be occasions where both parties determine that it makes sense to actually get some things done in this town. But wherever I can work on my own to expand opportunity for more Americans, I'm going to do that. And I am absolutely convinced that the time is right to partner with the States and Governors of—all across the country on these agendas, because I know that you guys are doing some terrific work in your own States.

There may not be much of an appetite in Congress for doing big jobs bills, but we can still grow SelectUSA. Secretary Pritzker's team has put together a terrific formula where we're attracting investors from all around the world to see America as an outstanding place to invest. And I mentioned this at the State of the Union, for the first time last year, what we're seeing is, is that world investors now see America as the number-one place to do business rather than China. And it's a sign of a lot of things converging, both on the energy front, worker productivity, our innovation, our research, our ease of doing business. And a lot of that work is as a consequence of steps we've taken not just at the Federal level, but also at the State level. So we've got to take advantage of that.

Secretary Pritzker has been helping a Belgian company create jobs in Stillwater, Oklahoma, helping an Austrian company create jobs in Cartersville, Georgia. So we can do more of this, and we'd really want to engage with you over the next several months to find ways that we can help market America and your States to businesses all around the world and bring jobs back.

Since I called on Congress to raise the minimum wage last year, six States have gone ahead and done it on their own. Last month, I asked more business leaders to raise their workers' wages. Last week, Gap said it would lift wages for about 65,000 of its employees. Several of you are trying to boost wages for your workers. I'm going to do everything I can to support those efforts.

While Congress decides what it's going to do on making high-quality pre-K available to more kids, there is bipartisan work being done among the folks in this room. You've got Governors like Robert Bentley and Jack Markell, Susana Martinez, Deval Patrick, all expanding funding or dedicating funds to make that happen in their States. And we want to partner with you. This year, I'll pull together a coalition of philanthropists, elected officials, and business leaders, all of whom are excited and interested in working with you to help more kids access the high-quality pre-K that they need.

And while Congress talks about repealing the Affordable Care Act or doing this or doing that to it, places like California and Kentucky are going gangbusters and enrolling more Americans in quality, affordable health care plans. You've got Republican Governors here—I won't name them in front of the press, because I don't want to get you all in trouble—who have chosen to cover more people through new options under Medicaid. And as a result, millions of people are going to get help.

States that don't expand Medicaid are going to be leaving up to 3.4—5.4 Americans—million Americans uninsured. And that doesn't have to happen. Work with us to get this done. We can provide a lot of flexibility. Folks like Mike Beebe in Arkansas have done some terrific work designing programs that are right for their States, but also provide access to care for people who need it. And I think Kathleen Sebelius, a former Governor herself, has shown herself willing to work with all of you to try to find ways to get that done.

On the West Coast, you've got Governors Brown, Inslee, Kitzhaber who are working together to combat the effects of climate change on their States. We've set up the task force of Governors and mayors and tribal leaders to help communities prepare for what we anticipate are going to be intensifying impacts of climate change. And we're setting up climate hubs in seven States across the country to help farmers and ranchers adapt their operations to a changing environment.

In the budget that I'll send to Congress next week, I'm going to propose fundamentally reforming the way Federal Governments fund wildfire suppression and prevention to make it more stable and secure, and this is an idea that's supported by both Democrats and Republicans.

And finally, I want to thank those of you who have worked with Michelle and Jill Biden on their Joining Forces initiative to support our military families. At your meeting here 2 years ago, they asked for your help to make it easier for servicemembers and their spouses to carry licenses for professions like teaching or nursing from State to State, rather than have to get a new one every time they were reassigned. At the time, only 12 States had acted to make this easier for spouses; only 9 had acted to make it easier for servicemembers. Today, 42 States have passed legislation to help spouses; 45 States have made it easier for servicemembers. We've got a few States remaining. Let's get it done for everybody, because it's the right thing to do for those men and women who are working every day to make sure we stay free and secure.

And the point is, even when there is little appetite in Congress to move on some of these priorities, at the State level, you guys are governed by practical considerations. You want to do right by your people, and you see how good policy impacts your citizens, and you see how bad policy impacts your citizens, and that means that there's less room for posturing and politics and more room for getting stuff done.

We want to work with you. And I'm committed to making sure that every single member of my Cabinet, every single person in the White House, every single member of my team will be responsive to you. We won't agree on every single issue every single time, but I guarantee you that we will work as hard as we can to make sure that you succeed. Because when you succeed, the people in your States succeed and America succeeds, and that's our goal.

So thank you very much, and I look forward to having a great discussion. All right? Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:15 a.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Mary Fallin of Oklahoma, in her capacity as chair, and Gov. John W. Hickenlooper of Colorado, in his capacity as vice chair, of the National Governors Association; Gov. Robert J. Bentley of Alabama; Gov. Jack A. Markell of Delaware; Gov. Susana Martinez of New Mexico; Gov. Deval L. Patrick of Massachusetts; Gov. Edmund G. "Jerry" Brown, Jr., of California; Gov. Jay R. Inslee of Washington; Gov. John A. Kitzhaber of Oregon; and Jill T. Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Vice President Biden.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : National Governors Association :: Meeting.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Beebe, Michael D.; Bentley, Robert J.; Biden, Jill T.; Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Brown, Edmund G. "Jerry," Jr.; Fallin, Mary; Hickenlooper, John W.; Inslee, Jay R.; Kitzhaber, John A.; Markell, Jack A.; Martinez, Susana; Obama, Michelle; Patrick, Deval L.; Pritzker, Penny S.; Sebelius, Kathleen .

Subjects: Alabama, Governor; Arkansas, Governor; Armed Forces, U.S. : Military families; Business and industry : Unemployed workers, hiring best practices and incentives; California : Governor; Colorado : Governor; Commerce, Department of : Secretary; Commerce, Department of : SelectUSA trade and investment initiative; Delaware, Governor; Economy,

national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Early childhood education programs; Employment and unemployment : Job training and assistance programs; Environment : Climate change ; Governors Association, National; Health and Human Services, Department of : Secretary; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Labor issues : Minimum wage; Massachusetts : Governor; Natural disasters : Wildfires, prevention and response efforts; New Mexico, Governor; Oklahoma : Governor; Oregon, Governor; Social Security and retirement : Retirement accounts :: Treasury savings account; Washington : Governor; White House Office : Vice President.

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