

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

Remarks at a Question-and-Answer Session on Student Loan Debt and College Affordability With Tumblr Participants

June 10, 2014

The President. Hello, everybody.

Audience members. Hi.

The President. Hey, you don't have to be so formal. [*Laughter*] Sheesh. Come on, now.

Tumblr, Inc., Chief Executive Officer David Karp. This is unusual. Thank you. Thank you, everyone, and welcome to the White House. Thank you for having us, Mr. President. I'm David Karp, the founder of Tumblr, and it is my tremendous privilege to be here with President Obama today and joined by the Tumblr community. Thank you for joining us, everyone.

Yesterday the President signed an Executive order intended to curb the pain of student debt. Americans now hold more than a trillion dollars in student debt, one of the greatest expenses they'll incur in their lifetime. And the generation that's just reaching college age is beginning to wonder if it's even worth it.

One-third of Americans who have applied for an education loan this year also happen to use Tumblr, so last week we asked our audience if they had questions that they'd like to ask the President about the cost value and accessibility of higher education. And turns out, they had quite a few. We're not going to be able to get through all of them today, but the President has been kind enough to give us some time at his house to answer some of those questions. [*Laughter*]

So again, huge thank you for making yourself available today. Anything you'd like to add before we start?

The President. Well, first of all, this is a rental house. [*Laughter*] And I just want to be clear: My lease runs out in about 2½ years.

Second of all, I want to thank David and the whole Tumblr community for participating in this. We're constantly looking for new ways to reach audiences that are relevant to the things we're talking about. And obviously, young people disproportionately use Tumblr. A lot of Tumblr users are impacted by student debt. So for you to be able to give us this forum to speak directly to folks is wonderful, and I'm looking forward to a whole bunch of good questions.

Mr. Karp. Thank you. Okay, so everybody is clear on how the questions worked, so since we closed for questions 5 p.m. yesterday, we brought together a team of influential Tumblr bloggers who helped us select some of the best questions. There are—a few of them, anyway, are joining us in the audience in the State Dining Room here today. Neither the White House nor the President have seen any of these questions in advance.

Should we get started?

The President. Let's go.

President's Student Loan Debt/Tuition Costs

Mr. Karp. All right. So first came in from Caitlin: "I appreciate your willingness to work with legislators to attempt to retroactively diffuse the cost of some student's loans by creating new repayment plans, but this seems to me like an attempt to put a band aid on a broken leg. What are we doing to actually lower the cost of a college degree"—excuse me—"of college tuition so these loans will no longer be necessary?"

The President. Well, it's a great question. And let me give people some context for what's happened over the last 20, 30 years.

I graduated from college in '83, graduated from law school in 1990. And although I went to a private school, through a combination of grants, loans, and working, I had a fairly low level of debt that I was able to pay in 1 year without getting an incredibly well-paying job. I was able to keep my debt burden pretty low. Folks who were 10 years younger than me, they probably paid even less. And if you went to a State school at the time, typically people would come out with almost no debt whatsoever.

Today, the average debt burden, even for young people who are going to a public university, is about \$30,000. And that gives you some sense of how much the cost has escalated for the average young person.

Now, you mentioned earlier some people are wondering, is this a good investment? It absolutely is. The difference between a college grad and somebody with a high school diploma is about \$28,000 a year in income. So it continues to be a very smart investment for you to go to college. But we have to find ways to do two things.

One is, we have to lower the costs on the front end. And then, if you do have to supplement whatever you can pay with borrowing, we've got to make sure that that is a manageable debt. And about 12 months ago, maybe 16 months ago, I convened college and university presidents around the country to start working with them on how we could lower debt—or lower tuition, rather.

The main reason that tuition has gone up so much is that State legislatures stopped subsidizing public universities as much as they used to, in part because they started spending money on things like prisons and other activities that I think are less productive. And so schools then made up for the declining State support by jacking up their tuition rates.

What's also happened is, is that the costs of things like health care that a university community with a lot of personnel has—have to shoulder, those costs have gone up faster than wages and incomes. The combination of those things has made college tuition skyrocket faster than health care costs have.

There are ways we can bring down those costs, and we know that because there are some colleges who have done a very good job in keeping tuition low. We also have to do a better job of informing students about how to keep their debt down, because frankly, universities don't always counsel young people well when they first come in. They say, don't worry about it, you can pay for it, not realizing that you're paying for it through borrowing that you're going to end up having to shoulder once you graduate.

Student Financial Counseling Efforts

Mr. Karp. What does—what does that help, what does that support look like? So Chelsea sent in a very similar question from Portland. So she asks: "Colleges help students get into debt. They don't often help offer financial planning services before school, after they graduate."

Do you guys have a plan to help students make sound financial decisions? I mean, these are teenagers who are making decisions sometimes amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars that are going to follow them through their entire lives. Hopefully, they have parents who can help them navigate those decisions. But if they don't, are they on their own?

The President. Well, we are already doing something we call Know What You Owe. And the idea is to work with every college, university, community college out there so that when you come into school, ideally even before you accept an admission from a school, you are given a sense of what your annual loans might be, what your financial package is going to translate into in terms of debt, assuming you go through a 4-year degree on schedule, and what your monthly payments are likely to be afterwards.

And so just that one step alone—making sure that schools are obliged to counsel you on the front end when you come in, as opposed to just on the exit interview once you've already accumulated the debt—that in and of itself can make a big difference.

Mr. Karp. Understood. We didn't get first names for everybody. So Haiku Moon asks—*[laughter]*.

The President. That might be the first name. That's a cool name. *[Laughter]*

Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) in New York City/Vocational Education/Income-Based Repayments

Mr. Karp. "It wasn't until after I graduated college that I realized what I wanted to do with my life. Now I have a degree that has very little to do with that goal and a mountain of debt. I can't help but wonder if I wasn't pressured to go to college and was better prepared to make that decision—and if I was better prepared to make that decision, that I might be in a better place to pursue my dreams today. How can we change the public education system to better prepare and support young people making this huge decision?" I mean, again, teenagers deciding what they want to do for the rest of their lives.

The President. Well, one of the things that Haiku Moon—*[laughter]*—is alluding to is that high school should be a time in which young people have greater exposure to actual careers as opposed to just classroom study.

And I went to a wonderful school in New York called P-TECH, went there for a visit. What they've done is they have collapsed high school basically into a 3-year program. You can then extend for another 2 years and get an associate's degree. IBM is working with them so that if in fact they complete the curriculum that IBM helped to design, they know they've got a job at IBM on the back end. And that's just one example of what I'd like to see a lot more high schools do, which is give young people in high school more hands-on experience, more apprenticeships, more training.

If you are a graphic—somebody who is interested in graphic design, I'd rather have you work at a company doing graphic design your senior year or junior year to see if you actually like it, to get a sense of the training you need. You may not need a 4-year degree. You might only need a 2-year degree. You might be able to work while getting that degree. All that can save you money. So that can make a really big difference for high school kids.

At the same time, one of the things that we initiated several years back is something called income-based repayments. And that's something I really want to focus on, is—IBR for short—income-based repayments. What we did in 2011 was to say, all student loans going forward, if

you have a debt and you decide you want to go into a job that—like teaching or social work—that doesn't necessarily pay a lot, you shouldn't be hampered from making that choice just because you've got such a significant debt load. So what we said was that we will cap your repayments of your loans at 10 percent of your income above \$18,000. And by doing that, that gives people flexibility. It doesn't eliminate your debt. But what it does is it makes it manageable each month so that the career that you choose may not be constrained. And we then have additional programs so that if you go into one of the helping professions—public service, law enforcement, social work, teaching—then over time, that debt could actually be forgiven.

Now, the problem with it was that we passed this law in 2011; it only applied going forward. It didn't apply retroactively. So yesterday what I did was sign an executive action saying that the Department of Education is going to be developing rules so that, going backwards, anybody can avail themselves of this income-based repayments. Because I get a lot of letters from people who took out loans in 2005 or 2000; they are also in a situation where they're making regular payments, but it's very hard for them to make ends meet. And we want to ideally finish what's called the rulemaking process—nothing is easy around here—hopefully, by the time, say, the end of next year, the rules will be in place, that will be the law, and then everybody, and not just folks who borrowed after 2011, can take advantage of that.

But there's not a lot of knowledge of this, and I hope that the Tumblr community helps to spread the word that this is something already available for loans that you took out after 2011, and hopefully, by next year, it will be available for people even if you took out your loans before 2011.

Mr. Karp. Where do we find information about it?

The President. You should go to whitehouse.gov, the White House website. It will then link you to ED.gov, which is the Education Department website. But whitehouse.gov, I figure, is easier to remember. [*Laughter*]

Student Loan Repayment Options

Mr. Karp. Can you elaborate real quick on encouraging public service? So Josh from Oak Park sent in a really good question about this: "The U.S. has a long history of encouraging college-age men and women to give back to their larger communities through organizations like the Peace Corps, through organizations like Teach for America.

The President. Right.

Mr. Karp. Couldn't we make a larger commitment to that by creating tuition loan forgiveness programs for those students who agree to work in those fields or work in those geographic areas in need of skilled employees?" So you can imagine family practice doctors; you can imagine public defenders.

The President. I mean, right now we have some programs like this in place, but they're typically relatively small, relatively specialized. So there are some loan-forgiveness programs for primary care physicians who are going out to rural communities or inner cities or underserved communities. There are some programs that are available through the AmeriCorps program for people who are engaged in public service. They are not as broad based and widespread as I would like. And we have tried to work with Congress—so far, unsuccessfully—to be able to get an expansion of these areas.

And I'll—let's take health care as an example. We know that the population is aging. We know that we are—have a severe shortage of primary care physicians. A lot of young doctors are going into specialized fields like dermatology or plastic surgery because you can make a relatively large profit, you don't end up having a lot of liability, and that's not really what we need more of.

And so my hope is, is that over time, Congress recognizes that young people are our most precious asset. We—there are some areas that we know we need people to get into the field, our best and brightest, and right now the financial burdens are precluding them from doing it. And we could open up those fields to a huge influx of talent if we were a little smarter with it.

Mr. Karp. Okay. So you've touched on health care in public service and health care in general. You talk a lot about STEM fields. So how do we promote—this is one Orta asked: "How can we promote growth in STEM fields without putting humanities on the back burner?"

Humanities Education/Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Education

The President. Well, first of all, I want to say, I was a humanities major. [Laughter] So I majored in political science, and I majored in—and I minored in English. And I was pretty good in math, but in high school—I actually loved math and science until I got into high school, and then I misspent those years. [Laughter] And the thing about the humanities was, you could kind of talk your way through classes, which you couldn't do in math and science, right? [Laughter]

So a great liberal arts humanities education is still critically important, because in today's global economy, one of the most important skills you have is your ability to work with people and communicate clearly and effectively. Having said that, what is also true is that technology is going to continue to drive innovation. And just to be a good citizen, you need some background in STEM, and we are not producing enough engineers, enough computer scientists, enough math teachers and science teachers, and enough researchers.

And so I'm putting a big emphasis on STEM in part because we have a shortage, not because I'm privileging one over the other, but because we don't have as many people going into the STEM fields. And it starts early.

Part of the—what we're trying to do is work with public schools to take away some of the intimidation factor in math and science. Part of what we're trying to do is make sure that we are reaching to demographics that are very underrepresentative, and yes, I mean you, women. Girls are still more likely to be discouraged from pursuing math, science, technology degrees. You see that imbalance in Silicon Valley, you see it in a lot of high-tech firms.

And so we're trying to lift up curriculums that are interesting for kids, work with schools in terms of best practices. One of the things that we're also discovering is that young people who have an interest in math and science, when they go to college, oftentimes, they're steered into finance because that's been perceived as the more lucrative option. And we're trying to work with universities and departments of engineering, for example, to help mentor young people to understand that, if you look at the top 100 companies in the country, you've got a lot more engineers running companies than you do folks who have a finance background.

And so there are great opportunities. And one of the things that every young person should be thinking about is, A, what's their passion, what do they care about, but they should also be taking a look at where is there a demand. And frankly, if you've got a science or engineering background, the likelihood of you being unemployed is very low, because there's

always going to be a need. And it doesn't preclude you from writing a haiku at some point and figuring out some creative outlet. But having that discipline and that skillset is still going to be invaluable.

President's Career Advice for Young People

Mr. Karp. Well, what you just described is really hard to navigate, the—again, a teenager making the decision between passion or an industry that's going to have demand for them. So great question: "At this point, I'm stuck between majors. I know the field I have a passion for has a limited number of jobs, all of which pay very little. Assuming I get the job, the low income will make it difficult to pay the substantial debt I'll most likely be in from that education. Are there other fields—excuse me—there are other fields I know I could succeed in and receive the higher salary, but I'm afraid that one day I'll realize I hate what I do."

The President. Right.

Question was, how did you decide on your career, and what advice do you have for somebody who is coming up trying to navigate that marketplace with demand or their passions?

The President. Well—

Mr. Karp. By the way, one vote for keeping kids out of finance, please. Yes. [*Laughter*]

The President. Or the law, by the way, because—[*laughter*—we have enough lawyers. Although it's a fine profession. [*Laughter*] And I can say that because I'm a lawyer.

I think everybody is different. But I do think that, first of all, when I first got out of school, I worked for a year in a job that I wasn't interested in because I wanted to pay off my loans.

Now, I had the luxury, as I said, that my loan burden was only—was small enough that I could pay it off in a year. But work is not always fun, and you can't always follow your bliss right away. And so I think that young people should be practical. I know a lot of young people who work for 5 years in some—in a field that they may not be interested, but it gives them the financial stability and the base from which then to do what they want. And there's nothing wrong with that.

I do—the main advice I would give young people starting off, though, is ultimately, you are going to do best at something you care deeply about. And some people have probably heard this said before, but if you really enjoy what you do, then it's—then the line between work and play starts vanishing a little bit. You still have to grind it out, but you can get into that mindset where the creativity or the effort and the sweat that you're putting into what you do doesn't feel like a burden, it feels like an expression of what you care about.

And so I think your career is not going to be a straight line all the time. I think there may be times where you got to take a detour and you got to do something practical to pay the bills. There are going to be times where you see an opportunity, and you're making a calculated risk that I'm going to start some wacky company called Tumblr. [*Laughter*]

And how you balance the practical with your highest aspirations is something that will be different for each person. Everybody is going to have different circumstances.

Value of College Education

Mr. Karp. What do you say to kids right now who ask you—they see their passion; they want to build big stuff for the Internet. They want to build the next big app or the next big

social network. What do you tell them when they say, hey, look, David, Zuckerberg, Jobs, Gates, all these guys——

The President. Just dropped out of school.

Mr. Karp.——might not necessarily deserve to get a company up, but dropped out of school?

The President. Yes. I mean, you wouldn't know it looking at you, but you're like LeBron or Durant. [Laughter] I mean, you guys don't have the same physiques—[laughter]——but there are only going to be so many Zuckerbergs or Gateses who are able to short-circuit the traditional path.

If you can, more power to you. But let me put it this way: Had you not—let's say Tumblr had been a bust, right? Or Facebook had just ended up being some dating site that nobody was really interested in. [Laughter]

Mr. Karp. We'd be in a hard place.

The President. Well, but the truth is, also you had the foundation where you could go back to school, right? I mean, it wasn't as if you were suddenly operating without a net. I'm assuming that you would have been readmitted to whatever institution you were in. And if not, then you would go to another school, and you'd do fine.

So the issue is not whether you may not want to take a risk at some point. The point is that for the average young person, an investment in college is always going to be a smart investment. Making sure you know what it is that you're investing in is important.

One of the biggest areas where we see a problem is young people who are going, let's say, to technical schools or community colleges or some of these for-profit universities, they're promised a lot. But they haven't done the research to see, okay, does typically a graduate coming out of one of these schools get a job in the occupation? Are they actually making money? If you're going to have \$50,000 worth of debt, you better have factored in what are the employment prospects coming out.

And so I think it's good for young people—not only good—it's imperative for young people to be good consumers of education, and don't just assume that there's one way of doing things.

We tell our daughters—Malia is now—she'll be 16 next month, and she's going to be in the college process. And we tell her, don't assume that there are 10 schools that you have to go to, and if you didn't go to those 10, that somehow things are going to be terrible. There are a lot of schools out there. There are a lot of options. And you should do your research before you decide to exercise one of those options. Having said that, the overwhelming evidence is that a college education is the surest, clearest path into the middle class for most Americans.

Department of Education's College Scorecard

Mr. Karp. Is the White House right now offering any of those tools to be a good a consumer, to navigate all the choices out there?

The President. Yes, yes. So if you go—again, go to whitehouse.gov, which will link you to the Department of Education, one of the things that we're doing is to—we're starting to develop a scorecard for colleges and universities so you have just a general sense of what's the typical graduation rate, what's the typical debt that you carry once you get out, what is the

employment rate for graduates 5 years afterwards. And over time, one of the things that we're trying to do is develop a ranking system that is not exactly the same as the typical college-ranking systems that you see in U.S. News & World Report, for example.

Part of the problem with the traditional ranking systems of schools is that, for example, high cost is actually a bonus in the ranking system. It indicates prestige, and so there may be some great schools that are expensive, but what you're missing is a great school that may give you much better value, particularly in the field that you're in.

Now, there's some controversy, I want to confess, about—that a lot of colleges and universities say, you know, if you start ranking just based on cost and employability, et cetera, you're missing the essence of higher education and so forth. What we're really trying to do is just identify here are some good bargains, here are some really bad deals. Then there's going to be a bunch of schools in the middle that there's not going to be a huge amount of differentiation. But what we are trying to do is make sure that students have some—enough information going into it that they don't end up in a school that is pretty notorious for piling a lot of debt on their students, but not really delivering a great education.

Private Student Loan Debt/Bank on Students Emergency Loan Refinancing Act

Mr. Karp. Back to the debt, which is top of mind for everybody here today. So Megan from Tulsa asked an interesting question: "Of my \$220,000 in student loans"——

The President. Yikes.

Mr. Karp.——"from college and law school"—there you go—"less than half is receiving the benefit of loan forgiveness." Why is there no discussion on the mounting private student loan debt?

The President. Well, there is a discussion. The problem is we just end up having less leverage over that. I mean, the truth is, is that both legislatively and administratively, we have some impact on Federal loans. Private loans—if you take—if you go to a private company and you're taking out a loan, we have the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau that is trying to regulate this area and make sure that you have full information about what you're getting yourself into. It's another version of Know Before You Owe. But it's harder for us to restructure some of that debt.

Now, one thing that I think is really important for everybody to know here—because this is actual action you can take, as opposed to just listening to me blather on—this week, there will be a vote in the United States Senate on a bill sponsored by Elizabeth Warren, the Senator from Massachusetts. And what this bill would do would allow students to refinance their existing loans at today's rates. The reason that's important is because rates have been low, and typically, there's going to be a pretty big spread between the rates that a lot of students—the interest rates that a lot of students have on their debt right now, versus what they could do if they refinanced, the same way that a lot of people refinance their mortgages to take advantage of historically low rates.

And so this vote is coming up. It will come up this week. I think everybody on Tumblr should be contacting their Senators and finding out where they stand on the issue, because—and by the way, this is something that will not add to the deficit, because the way we pay for it is, we say that we're going to eliminate some loopholes right now that allow millionaires and billionaires to pay lower rates of taxes than secretaries and teachers. And so it would pay for itself. It's a good piece of legislation. It directly affects folks in their twenties and thirties, and

in some cases, their forties and fifties and sixties. But particularly the young people who use Tumblr, this is something that you should pay a lot of attention to. Make sure that you are pushing your Senators around this issue.

Student Engagement in Education/Vocational Education

Mr. Karp. Particularly important if you know you're facing that debt already—

The President. Right.

Mr Karp. —or you are already today facing that debt. What's the best way, though, for people who are—again, they're thinking about higher education, they're in school today—Emma asked a thoughtful question: "What is the best way for students to have a voice in their own education?" So much education today, I think, really—I don't know, I mean, so many teenagers who feel like education is happening to them. They're going through the motions. They know that this is what they're supposed to do, and so they follow along. How do we make sure kids are driving?

The President. Well, look, at some point it's going to be up to the young person to drive that education. It's not inevitable that you just fasten your seatbelt and just go on a ride for 4 years or 2 years or whatever it is. I mean, I have to say that in my own college experience, I think the first 2 years I was there thinking, I'm just happy to be here and I'm having fun and I'll just sort of go through the motions. My last 2 years was when I really became much more serious about what I was doing and much more intentional about what I was doing.

That—too many young people see—and I'm grossly generalizing now, so excuse me—but I use myself as an example as well. I think too many of us see college as a box to check or a place to have fun and extend adolescence—[*laughter*]—as opposed to a opportunity for each of us to figure out what is it that we're good at, what is it that we care about, what is it that we're willing to invest a lot of time and effort and energy into, how do we hone some skills or interests or attributes that we already have. And as a consequence, I think young people waste a lot of time in school.

Now, again, I'm generalizing, because there are a whole bunch of folks who are working while going to school, while helping out their parents. In some cases, they're already parents themselves. And so everything I just said does not apply to you. You are and a lot—it's interesting, one of the reasons I think I did well in law school was because I had worked for 3½ years, so that by the time I got to law school, I actually knew why I was studying the law, and I knew exactly what I wanted to get out of it, not to mention the fact that the idea of just going to class for 3 hours a day and then reading didn't seem particularly oppressive to me, whereas young people who had come straight out of college thought, this is horrible. You are—try working for a while, and then you realize that this is a pretty good deal. [*Laughter*]

So—but I think that part of what we as adults have to do goes back to what I said about high schools. Education is not a passive thing. You don't tip your head and somebody pours it into your ear. It is an active process of you figuring out the world and your place in it. And the earlier we can help young people—not lock them in. Look, nobody expects that somebody who is 16 automatically knows exactly what they want to do, and their—people may change their minds repeatedly. But what we can do is expose young people to enough actual work and occupations that they start getting a feel for what they would be interested in. And I really want to work with more school districts, and I've asked Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to work with more school districts, and we're actually giving grants to school districts that are thinking creatively about how high school can be used more effectively.

I don't want a young person who knows that they want to go into the trades to just waste 4 years of high school, and then they've got to go through 2 years of apprenticeship and classwork before they become a contractor. I'd rather have them doing contracting while also getting some other educational exposure so that they're getting a jump on the things that they want to do. And they can save a lot of money in the process.

Vocational Education

Mr. Karp. So Beth asked a question close to that—instead of—close to that point: "Instead of pushing all students into college, shouldn't we focus on the other side, increasing the minimum wage and making it viable, livable, to enter the workforce straight out of high school?" Should we be doing both?

The President. Absolutely. Well, here is what I would say: There are very few jobs now where you're not going to need some advanced training.

Mr. Karp. Okay.

The President. One of the great things about being President is, I get to visit companies and worksites and factories. And if you go into a—the average auto company today, for example, first of all, it's not at all what you'd imagine. It is spotless, and it is quiet, and it is humming, because it is all mechanized and computerized at this point. And even if you have a four-football-field-sized assembly line, most of the people there are working with machines, and they're working on computer keyboards.

So having some basic training in math, some familiarity with computers, some familiarity with programming and code, all that is a huge advantage if you are trying to get a job on an assembly line. Now, if that's true for assembly line work, that's certainly going to be true for any other trade that you're interested in.

We do have to do a better job of giving young people who are interested an effective vocational education. And there are tons of opportunities out there for people—here's an interesting statistic: The average trade person in Wisconsin—and what I mean by that is an electrician, a plumber, a carpenter, a machine tool worker—the average age in Wisconsin is 59 years old, right? Now, these jobs typically pay 25, 30 bucks an hour, potentially, with benefits. You can make a really good living doing that, and there are a lot of folks who love doing it. It's really interesting work and highly skilled work.

So I don't want somebody to find out about that when they're 30, after they've already

Mr. Karp. Okay. Got the debt—

The President. —taken a bunch of classes and stuff that they ended up not using; now they've got a bunch of debt. I'd rather, if they got that inclination, to figure that early and be able to go straight into something that helps them get that job.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972/Application of Title IX to Transgender Students

Mr. Karp. So one question we heard a lot from our community that I wanted to make sure to mention today: "Recently,"—I think you've been following—"the Department of Ed's Office of Civil Rights and the DOJ have extended title IX protections to trans students. What do you see as the next steps to ensure equal treatment of trans people in schools in America?"

The President. Well, title IX is a powerful tool. It's interesting, yesterday I had the University of Connecticut men's and women's basketball teams here. This is only the second

time that the men's and women's basketball teams won the national championship in the same year. The previous year was 2004, and it was UConn again.

But what was interesting about it is that the men were kind of a surprise. It was nice. The women were dominant. I mean, the UConn Husky women's program has—they rule. And they are incredible athletes. And talking to these young women, they're poised, and they're beautiful, and some of them are 6'6", and they're wearing high heels and supremely confident and competitive. And that's a huge shift from even 20 years ago or 30 years ago. The reason for that was title IX was applied vigorously in schools, and it gave opportunities—it's not like women suddenly became athletes. They were athletic before. Michelle, when I work out with her, she puts me to shame. [Laughter] But it had more to do with restrictions and opportunity.

So the point I'm making is, is that title IX is a very powerful tool. The fact that we are applying it to transgender students means that they are going to be in a position to assert their rights if and when they see that they are being discriminated on their college campuses. And that could manifest itself in a whole variety of ways.

Gun Control

Mr. Karp. Brilliant. This one was sent in a few days ago: "Mr. President, my name is Nick Dineen, and I attend the school"—excuse me—"I attend school at the University of California—Santa Barbara. I was the RA for the floor that George Chen lived in"—excuse me—"lived on last year as a first-year college student. I knew him. Elliot Rodger killed him and five more of my fellow students. Today another man has shot and killed at least one person and injured three others at a private Christian school in Seattle. What are you going to do? What can we all do?" And of course, another mass shooting this morning.

The President. I have to say that people often ask me how has it been being President, and what are my—what am I proudest of and what are my biggest disappointments. And I've got 2½ years left. My biggest frustration so far is the fact that this society has not been willing to take some basic steps to keep guns out of the hands of people who can do just unbelievable damage.

We're the only society—we're the only developed country on Earth where this happens. And it happens now once a week. And it's a 1-day story. There's no place else like this. A couple of decades ago, Australia had a mass shooting similar to Columbine or Newtown. And Australia just said, "Well, that's it, we're not doing—we're not seeing that again," and basically, imposed very severe, tough gun laws. And they've never—they haven't had a mass shooting since.

Our levels of gun violence are off the charts. There's no advanced, developed country on Earth that would put up with this. Now, we have a different tradition. We have a Second Amendment. We have historically respected gun rights. I respect gun rights. But the idea that, for example, we couldn't even get a background check bill in to make sure that if you're going to buy a weapon, you have to actually go through a fairly rigorous process so that we know who you are, so that you can't just walk up to a store and buy a semiautomatic weapon—it makes no sense.

And I don't know if anybody saw the brief press conference from the father of the young man who had been killed at Santa Barbara. And as a father myself, I just could not understand the pain he must be going through and just the primal scream that he gave out: Why aren't we doing something about this?

And I will tell you, I have been in Washington for a while now, and most things don't surprise me. The fact that 20 6-year-olds were gunned down in the most violent fashion possible and this town couldn't do anything about it was stunning to me. And so the question then becomes, what can we do about it? The only thing that is going to change is public opinion. If public opinion does not demand change in Congress, it will not change. We have—I've initiated over 20 executive actions to try to tighten up some of the rules and the laws, but the bottom line is, is that we don't have enough tools right now to really make as big of a dent as we need to.

And most Members of Congress—and I have to say, to some degree, this is bipartisan—are terrified of the NRA. The combination of the NRA and gun manufacturers are very well financed and have the capacity to move votes in local elections and congressional elections. And so if you're running for office right now, that's where you feel the heat. And people on the other side may be generally favorable towards things like background checks and other commonsense rules, but they're not as motivated. So that's not—that doesn't end up being the issue that a lot of you vote on.

And until that changes, until there is a fundamental shift in public opinion in which people say, enough, this is not acceptable, this is not normal, this isn't, sort of, the price we should be paying for our freedom; that we can have respect for the Second Amendment, and responsible gun owners and sportsmen and hunters can have the ability to possess weapons, but that we are going to put some commonsense rules in place that make a dent, at least, in what's happening; and until that is not just the majority of you—because that's already the majority of you, even the majority of gun owners believe that—but until that's a view that people feel passionately about and are willing to go after folks who don't vote—in reflecting those values, until that happens, sadly, not that much is going to change.

The last thing I'll say: A lot of people will say that, well, this is a mental health problem, it's not a gun problem. The United States does not have a monopoly on crazy people. [Laughter] It's not the only country that has psychosis. And yet we kill each other in these mass shootings at rates that are exponentially higher than anyplace else. Well, what's the difference? The difference is, is that these guys can stack up a bunch of ammunition in their houses, and that's sort of par for the course.

So the country has to do some soul searching about this. This is becoming the norm, and we take it for granted in ways that, as a parent, are terrifying to me. And I am prepared to work with anybody, including responsible sportsmen and gun owners, to craft some solutions. But right now it's not even possible to get even the mildest restrictions through Congress, and that's—and we should be ashamed of that.

President's Plans for His Post-Presidency

Mr. Karp. Thank you for taking the time to answer that one. Obviously, an incredibly difficult and disappointing conversation to have.

It looks like we have time for one more question, so let's switch over to a lighter one. There are plenty of young people out there today who are watching your career incredibly closely. They're thinking about their futures, their careers, their educations that they're going off to pursue. Astonishment asked, "Where do you see yourself in 10 years?" [Laughter]

The President. Well, I haven't projected out 10 years. I'm really focused on making sure that I make every day in the next 2½ years count, because it's an incredible privilege to be in this office. And even when I'm frustrated with Congress or I'm frustrated with the press and

how it's reporting things and Washington generally, I also know that there's something I can do every single day that's helping somebody and that, sometimes without a lot of fanfare, we're making it easier for a business to get a loan and we're making it easier for a young person to get an education and we're making it easier for a family to get health care and making sure that each day I come away with something that we've done to make it a little easier for folks to work their way into the middle class, to stay in the middle class, to save for retirement, to finance their kids' college educations—that's a good day for me.

I know what I'll do, like, right after the next President is inaugurated. I'll be on a beach somewhere drinking a—out of a coconut. [*Laughter*] But that probably won't last too long.

And one of the things that Michelle and I have talked about a lot is, we're really interested in developing young people and working with them and creating more institutions to promote young leadership. I'm so impressed when I meet young people around the country. They're full of passion. They're full of ideas. I think they're much wiser and smarter than I was, part of it maybe is because of Tumblr, I don't know. [*Laughter*]

And so there's just huge potential. And the challenge is, they're also fed a lot of cynicism. You guys are fed a lot of cynicism every single day about how nothing works and big institutions stink and government is broken. And so you channel a lot of your passion and energy into various private endeavors.

But this country has always been built both through an individual initiative, but also a sense of some common purpose. And if there's one message I want to deliver to young people like a Tumblr audience is, don't get cynical. Guard against cynicism. I mean, the truth of the matter is, is that for all the challenges we face, all the problems that we have, if you had to be—if you had to choose any moment to be born in human history, not knowing what your position was going to be, who you were going to be, you'd choose this time. The world is less violent than it has ever been. It is healthier than it has ever been. It is more tolerant than it has ever been. It is better fed than it's ever been. It is more educated than it's ever been.

Terrible things happen around the world every single day, but the trend lines of progress are unmistakable. And the reason is, is because each successive generation tries to learn from previous mistakes and pushes the course of history in a better direction. And the only thing that stops that is if people start thinking that they don't make a difference and they can't make changes. And that's fed in our culture all the time.

It's fascinating to me—I don't consume a lot of television, but generally, the culture right now is inherently in a cynical mood in part because we went through a big trauma back in 2007, 2008 with the financial crisis, and we went through a decade of wars that were really tough. And that's the era in which you were born.

But look out on the horizon, and there's a lot of opportunity out there. And that's what I'd like to do after the Presidency, is make sure that I help young people guard against cynicism and do the remarkable things they can do. Good.

Mr. Karp. Beautiful. Mr. President, thank you so much for taking time to answer our questions today, really.

The President. We had a great time. Appreciate it. Enjoyed it.

Mr. Karp. Really. Thank you.

The President. Appreciate it. It was great. Thank you. Thank you.

Mr. Karp. Was that okay? I've never talked to a President before.

The President. He's a natural. You could have gone into journalism.

Mr. Karp. I've never talked to a President before. Thank you so much. So, hey, real quick, guys, before we go, I would really like to thank the President for having us over to his rental property today. [*Laughter*] Yes. It really does mean a lot to our community to know that America's leader is listening to us. I hope we've all come away with a clear picture as to the issues that we're facing. Please make sure to follow whitehouse.tumblr.com. And lastly, please wish—excuse me—Sasha a happy 13th birthday from us.

The President. It is Sasha's birthday today.

Mr. Karp. Now that she's 13, guys, now that she's 13, according to our terms of service, she's officially old enough to use Tumblr. [*Laughter*] Let us know.

The President. So she wasn't before that? [*Laughter*]

Mr. Karp. She wasn't. I'm Sorry. We can let this one slide. [*Laughter*]

The President. I'm going to have to talk to somebody about that. [*Laughter*]

All right. Thank you, guys. Had a great time.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:15 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to LeBron R. James, forward, National Basketball Association's Miami Heat; Kevin W. Durant, forward, NBA's Oklahoma City Thunder; Mark E. Zuckerberg, founder and chief executive officer, Facebook, Inc.; William H. Gates III, chairman, Microsoft Corp.; and Richard Martinez, father of Christopher Michaels-Martinez, who was killed in the May 23 shootings near the campus of University of California—Santa Barbara in Isla Vista, CA. He also referred to the memorandum of June 9 on helping struggling Federal student loan borrowers manage their debt. Mr. Karp referred to Elliot Oliver Robertson Rodger, accused gunman in the May 23 shootings in Isla Vista, CA; Aaron Rey Ybarra, suspected gunman in the June 5 shootings near the campus of Seattle Pacific University in Seattle, WA; and Paul Lee, who was killed in the June 5 shootings.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Student loan debt and college affordability, question-and-answer session with Tumblr participants.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Duncan, Arne; Durant, Kevin W.; Gates, William H., III ; James, LeBron R.; Karp, David; Martinez, Richard ; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha “Sasha”; Warren, Elizabeth; Zuckerberg, Mark E.

Subjects: Civil rights : Firearm rights; Civil rights : Women's rights and gender equality; Connecticut : Shootings in Newtown; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Education : Postsecondary education :: College opportunity, expansion efforts; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, interest rates and refinancing; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, repayment options; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, repayment options"; Education : Science and math programs; Education : Teachers; Education : Vocational and technical education programs; Education, Department of : Secretary; Law enforcement and crime : Gun control; Law enforcement and crime : Gun violence, prevention efforts; Tumblr.

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