

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

Remarks at a Town Hall Meeting and a Question-and-Answer Session in Minneapolis, Minnesota

June 26, 2014

The President. Hey! Hello, Minneapolis! Good to see you. Good to see you. Well, everybody have a seat. It is good to be back in Minnesota. Last time I was here, it was colder. [*Laughter*] Yes, here's just a tip for folks who are not from Minnesota: If you come here and the Minnesotans are complaining about how cold it is, it's really cold. [*Laughter*] Because these are some pretty tough folks. They don't get phased with cold. But it was cold. So it's nice to be back when it's a little warmer.

And I have to begin by congratulating our U.S. soccer team, Team U.S.A., for advancing to the next round of the World Cup.

Audience members. U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

The President. U.S.A.!

Audience members. U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

The President. Absolutely. We were in what's called the "Group of Death." [*Laughter*] And even though we didn't win today, we were in the toughest grouping, and we got through. And so we've still got a chance to win the World Cup. And we could not be prouder of them. They are defying the odds and earned a lot of believers in the process. And I want everybody on the team to know that all of us back home are really proud of them.

So I—let me tell you something. I've been really looking forward to getting out of DC. [*Laughter*] But I've also been looking forward to spending a couple days here in the Twin Cities. Our agenda is still a little loose. I might pop in for some ice cream or visit a small business. I don't know. I'm just going to make it up as I go along. With Secret Service—I always tease them. I'm like a caged bear, and every once in a while, I break loose. And I'm feeling super loose today. So you don't know what I might do. You don't know what I might do. Who knows?

But the main reason I'm glad to be here is I just wanted to have a chance to talk to folks about their lives and their hopes and their dreams and what they're going through. And I want to spend some time listening and answering your questions and just having a conversation about what's going well in your lives and in your neighborhoods and communities right now, but also what kinds of struggles folks are going through, and what things are helping and what things aren't.

Now, before I do I just want to mention our Governor, Mark Dayton, is here. And Mark gave me an update on the flooding that's been going on all across the State, and I know some folks here are probably affected by it as well. We made sure that FEMA is already on the ground here. The Army Corps of Engineers is helping to build up a levee in Warroad. I told the Governor that we will be there as we get some clarity about the damage and what needs to be done, and you are going to—you should feel confident that you're going to have a strong partner in FEMA and the Federal Government in the process of cleaning up.

And you can also feel confident because if we didn't help out, then I'd have Mayor Coleman and Mayor Hodges and Congressman Keith Ellison giving me a hard time. So they're going to hold me to it. They do a great job on behalf of their constituents every day.

I also wanted to mention that up the road, there's a memorial service for a person that many of you knew and loved, and that's Jim Oberstar, who served so long in Congress. I had a chance to know Jim; we overlapped before he came back home. He was a good man. He was a good public servant. He was somebody who never forgot the folks in the Iron Range that he was fighting for. And in a lot of ways, what he represented was a time when folks went to Washington, but they understood that they were working on behalf of hard-working middle class families and people who were trying to get into the middle class.

And that fight continues. We've made progress. And the one thing that I always remind people of is, on just about every economic measure, we are significantly better off than we were when I came into office. Unemployment is down, the deficits have been cut in half, housing market has improved, 401(k)s have gotten more solid. The number of people who are uninsured are down. Our exports are up, our energy production is up. So in the aggregate, when you look at the country as a whole, by pretty much every measure, the economy is doing better than it was when I came into office and in most cases significantly better.

We've created now 9.4 million new jobs over the last 51 months. The unemployment rate here in Minnesota is the lowest it's been since 2007. But here's the thing, and I'm not telling you anything that you don't know: There are still a lot of folks struggling out there.

We've got an economy that, even when it grows and corporate profits are high and the stock market is doing well, is still having trouble producing increases in salary and increases in wages for ordinary folks. So we've seen wages and incomes sort of flatline, even though the costs of food and housing and other things have gone up. And so there are a lot of people who work really hard, do the right thing, are responsible, but still find at the end of the month that they're not getting ahead. And that is the central challenge that drives me every single day when I think about what kinds of policies would help.

So I've put forward an opportunity agenda that is a continuation of things I've been talking about since I came into the United States Senate and served with Mark and things that I've been working on since I became President: making sure that hard work pays off; making sure that if you work hard, your kid can go to a good school and end up going to college without a huge amount of debt, that you're not going to go broke if you get sick, that you're able to have a home of your own, that you're able to retire with some dignity and some respect, maybe a vacation once in a while. That's what people are looking for. And that means that we've got to reverse this mindset that somehow if everybody at the top does really well, then somehow, benefits all automatically trickle down. Because that's not what's been happening for the last 20, 30 years.

We had—on Monday, we had what we called a White House Working Families Summit. And we just talked about bread-and-butter issues that everybody talks about around the kitchen table, but unfortunately, don't make it on the nightly news a lot. So we talked about childcare and the fact that it's prohibitive for too many young families. We talked about paid family leave, so that if a child was sick or a parent was sick, that you could actually go help and take care of them, which is, by the way, what every other developed country does. We're the only one that doesn't have it.

We talked about workplace flexibility, so that if you wanted to go to a parent-teacher conference with your family—or for your kid, or a school play, that you could balance that. And in fact, those companies, we discovered at the summit, who provide that kind of flexibility usually have more productive workers, harder working workers, more loyal workers, lower turnover, and the companies end up being more profitable.

We talked about increasing the minimum wage, which would benefit millions of people all across the country. We talked about equal pay for equal work, because I want my daughters getting paid the same as men do.

All of these things are achievable, but we've got to make Washington work for you, not for special interests, not for lobbyists. We don't need a politics that's playing to some—the most fringe elements of politics. We just need folks who are having a commonsense conversation about what's happening in your lives and how can we help and then trying to take some concrete actions that makes a difference.

So that's what I want to talk about. And I'm hoping that some people in Washington are going to be listening. Some of them will be, and they'll probably be saying I'm crazy or a Socialist or something—[*laughter*]*—*but, hopefully, they're—hearing from you, some of this stuff will sink in. All right?

So with that, I'm just going to take some questions. I've got my little hot tea here to make sure I don't lose my voice. And I think we've got microphones in the audience, and I'm just going to call on folks. The only rule I've got is when I call on you, you've got to wait for the microphone, introduce yourself. If you keep your question relatively short, I'll try to keep my answers relatively short. And I'm going to go boy, girl, boy, girl to make sure it's fair, all right? [*Laughter*]

All right. Let's start it off. All right, who wants to go first? This young lady right here. Tell me your name.

Study-Abroad Programs

Q. Hello, I'm Sheryl Hill.

The President. Hey, Sheryl.

Q. And I admire you so much and your office for the support we've received. I'm the founder of ClearCause. I work to protect our students abroad. I support hundreds of students who worked their way up through college—our best and our brightest—are not well protected by any surveillance or laws. They are robbed, raped, starved, abandoned, and killed. I'm here because of my son Tyler Hill.

The President. Well, the—so this is like an exchange programs?

Q. Study abroad.

The President. Study-abroad program. Generally, study abroad-programs are coordinated by the universities and colleges that sponsor them. There should be interaction between those educational institutions and the State Department. There are obviously some countries that are particularly dangerous, and in those cases, I think making sure that everybody has good information going in is important.

Tragedies happen when folks travel overseas. Unfortunately, tragedies happen here as well. But what I'd like to do is—let me find out more about the nature of the coordination that

happens between the State Department and study-abroad programs and see if there are some things that we can do to tighten them up. And it sounds like you've been thinking about it, so you may have some ideas. Excellent.

Gentleman in the cool sunglasses there.

Gun Control

Q. Good morning, Mr. President—or afternoon, Mr. President. My name is Dan Morette. And my question is—you spoke about tragedies at home—and how we can reduce gun violence in this Nation and what we can do to team up together and really make a difference.

The President. Well, on my way over here I was talking to a mom that I had lunch with, who's wonderful, by the way, and she's here, but I'm not going to embarrass her. And she's got a couple of young sons. And we talked about a whole bunch of issues: the cost of childcare, the fact that wages don't go up to meet the cost of living. But one thing she talked about was Newtown. And I described how the day that Sandy Hook happened was probably the worst day of my Presidency, and meeting those families just a couple days after they lost these beautiful 6-year-olds—20 of them—and then some of the parents—or some of the teachers and administrators who had been affected as well.

I was sure after that happened, there's no way that Congress isn't going to do some commonsense stuff. I mean, I thought that the issue of gun safety and commonsense legislation has been controversial for some time, but I thought that was going to be a breakthrough moment. The fact that it wasn't was probably the most disappointing moment that I've had with Congress.

What we've done is, we've developed 24 executive actions, things that were in our power, to really try to tighten tracking where guns go, making sure that we're sifting through and separating out responsible gun owners from folks who really shouldn't be having a weapon.

So we've probably made some progress. We've probably saved a few lives. But I will tell you, this is the only advanced country that tolerates something like this. We have what's basically a mass shooting, it seems like, happening once every couple weeks: kids on college campuses, kids at home. And we're not going to be able to eliminate all of that violence, and there's a strong tradition of gun ownership, and there are wonderful folks who are sportsman and hunters, and I respect all that. But we should be able to take some basic, commonsense steps that are, by the way, supported by most responsible gun owners, like having background checks so you can't just walk into a store and buy a semiautomatic.

So this is something I'm going to keep on talking about, but I was asked about this a few weeks ago, and I said, honestly, this is not going to change unless the people who want to prevent these kinds of mass shootings from taking place feel at least as passionate and are at least as mobilized and well funded and organized as the NRA and the gun manufacturers are. Because the politics in Congress are such where even Members of Congress who know better are fearful that if they vote their conscience and support commonsense back—gun legislation like background checks, they're worried that they're going to lose their seat. And frankly, there's a number who have, because the other side is very well organized.

So I will keep on talking about it. We're going to continue to work with law enforcement and community groups and others to try to take steps locally and at the State level. But if we're going to do something nationally, then we're going to have to mobilize ordinary folks—moms, dads, families, responsible gun owners, law enforcement—and they're going to have to get

organized and be able to counter the pressure that's coming from the other side in a sustained way. Not in a 1-week or 2-week or 1-month situation right after a tragedy occurs, it's going to have to just keep on going for several years before we are able to make progress. Okay? Good.

All right. Young lady right there. The one in the orange right—got a mike right next to you.

College Affordability/Federal Student Loan Programs

Q. I'm an educator in a public school, and I have a son in college who's struggling through college with student loans. I've been an educator for 27-plus years. And I know you're into sports, and I hear they generate a lot of money. We generate a lot of minds. And it really bothers me that I can't pay for his education.

The President. What's—I'm just curious what your son's circumstances are. Is he going to a State school? Is he going to a private school?

Q. He's going to a community college.

The President. He's going to a community college.

Q. And wants to go to college in New York, in fashion design.

The President. Okay. But he's in community college here in Minnesota right now?

Q. Correct.

The President. And is he eligible for the Federal student loans programs? Or is he finding that because of your income or your family's income that it's hard to get some of the lower interest loans?

Q. Both. He's kind of both.

The President. Okay. Well, look, this is something we've been spending a lot of time on. There are a couple components to the problem. And by the way, this is something near and dear to my heart because I was not born into a wealthy family. I'm only here because of my education, but the reason I was able to get that education was because grants, loans, work during the summer—all those things allowed me to pay the bills.

But college costs were lower then, when I was going to school. I know you can't tell from my gray hair, but I'm getting a little older now. [*Laughter*] And I—so I started college in 1979, and when I graduated—I was able to get a 4-year college education—I had some debt, but I could pay it off after 1 year. Now the average student that does have debt is seeing \$30,000 worth of debt. And even if they're able to take out loans, that's a burden that they're carrying with them in their first job. It may prevent them from buying their first home. If they've got a business idea, that's money that is going to take them a while before they're able to start a business, and as a consequence, it affects the whole economy.

Now, it is really important just to remind everybody, a college education is still a great investment as long as you graduate. As long as you graduate. So when you go into college, you've got to be determined, "I'm going to graduate." It's a great investment, but it's not a great investment if you take out \$20,000 worth of debt and you don't graduate, and you don't get the degree, which is why we're spending a lot of time talking to colleges about what are you doing to retain students.

But the things that we need to do are, number one, try to keep costs of student loans down. We've been working with colleges and universities, telling them, if the Federal Government is going to help subsidize your universities essentially with the student loan program, you need to show us that you are informing students ahead of time how much they're going to owe, that you are describing for them what their repayment plans would be, that you are keeping tuition low, and that you're graduating folks at a high rate.

So we've got to work with the colleges and universities to lower costs. We've got to keep the interest rates on student loans low. Right now there's legislation that was presented in the Senate—Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren sponsored it—and what it does is, it just allows student loans that you already have to be consolidated, and you can refinance them at a lower rate just like you could your mortgage if the rates go down. Republicans all voted against it. I don't know why. You will have to ask them. But that's an example of a tool we can use.

We've also put in place—this is something that I passed a while back and now I've expanded—a program whereby you never have to pay more than 10 percent of your current income to pay back your student loans, so that if you decide you want to go into teaching or you want to go into social work—something that is—may not be a high-paying profession, but a satisfying profession—that the fact that you've had some student debt is not going to preclude you from taking that position.

So there are a number of different steps that we're taking. I will tell you, though, in addition to what we do at the Federal level, you're going to need to talk to your State legislators. Part of the reason that tuition has gone up is because State legislatures across the country have consistently lowered the support that they provide public universities and community colleges, and then the community colleges and the public universities feel obliged to increase tuition rates. And that obviously adds the burden to students.

The bottom line is, your son is doing the right thing. The fact that he's starting at a community college will save him money. Even if he wants to graduate from a 4-year institution eventually, costs—it will still be a good investment. So he should shop around, get the right information. We're going to do everything we can to make sure that we keep it as affordable as possible. And I'm sure he's going to do wonderfully, and then he's going to look after his mom.

All right. Okay, it's a guy's turn. This gentleman right here.

Federal Funding for Research and Development/Advanced Manufacturing Hubs/Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Education

Q. Mr. President, like you, I'm the father of two beautiful, intelligent girls.

The President. Can't beat daughters. No offense, sons, but—[laughter].

Q. And they're both in STEM careers. I'm wondering what we can do to promote and encourage more girls to go into STEM careers.

The President. Oh, this is a great question. [Applause] This is a great question. First of all, STEM stands for science, technology, engineering, and math.

America became an economic superpower in large part because we were the most innovative economy. We are a nation of inventors and tinkerers, and we expand the boundaries of what's possible through science. And that continues to be the case. We still have the most cutting-edge technology, the most patents. But if we're not careful, we'll lose our lead. And if things aren't being invented here, then they're not being produced here. And if they're not

being produced here, that means the jobs aren't being created here. And over time, other countries catch up.

So what do we have to do? Number one, we've got to make sure that we're investing in basic science. Sometimes, people say, I don't know what the Federal Government spends the money on; they're all just wasting it. You know, one of the things that the Federal Government does is, it invests in basic research that companies won't invest in. And if it wasn't for the investment in basic research, then things like the Internet, things like GPS that everybody uses every day, things that result in cures for diseases that have touched probably every family that's represented here in some fashion—that stuff never happens.

You do the basic research, and then you move on to commercialize it, and that's oftentimes when the private sector gets involved. But they're not willing or able a lot of times to finance basic research. So that's number one.

Number two, we've got to make sure that we're investing in working with companies who are doing, let's say, advanced manufacturing, the next phases of manufacturing, linking them up with universities so that once we have a good idea, a good invention—whether it's clean energy or a new way to build a car—that the next phase of production and innovation is done here in the United States. And we've opened up four what we call advanced manufacturing hubs around the country—I actually want 15—where we link private sector and universities so that they become centers of innovation and jobs get created here in the United States.

But the third thing we need is we need more folks in engineering, math, science, technology, computer science. And that means we've got to have a school system, generally that encourages those subjects. And by the way, I was a political science and English major, and you need to know how to communicate, and I loved the liberal arts, so this is no offense, but we've got enough lawyers like me. We need more engineers. We need more scientists.

Generally speaking, we're not doing a good enough educating kids and encouraging them into these kinds of careers. We're particularly bad when it comes to girls. And my whole thing is—somebody said I was a sports fan. I am. And one rule of sports is, you don't play as well if you've only got half the team. We don't have everybody on the field right now if our young women are not being encouraged the same way to get into these fields. So this starts at an early age.

What we've done is, I've used my Office of Science and Technology to partner with elementary schools to, first of all, train teachers better in STEM, then to really focus on populations that are underrepresented in STEM—not only young women, but also African Americans, Latinos, others—getting them interested early. In some cases, for example, we know that young girls—I know as a father—they oftentimes do better if they're in a team and social environments, so making sure that the structure of science classes, for example, have collaboration involved and there's actual experience doing stuff, as opposed to just it being a classroom exercise. There are certain things that can end up making it a better experience for them, boosting their confidence, and encouraging them to get into the fields.

So we're going to continue to really spend a lot of time on this. I'll just close by saying every year now, I have a science fair at the White House, because my attitude is, if I'm bringing the top football and basketball teams to the White House, I should also bring the top scientists. I want them to feel that they get the spotlight just like athletes do. And these kids are amazing, except they make you feel really stupid. *[Laughter]*

The first young—the first student who I met—she's now—she just graduated. When she was 12, she was diagnosed with a rare liver cancer. Fortunately, she had health insurance. They caught it early enough, she responded to treatment. Lovely young lady—it didn't come back. But by the time she got into high school, she—and she was taking biology and chemistry, she became interested in, why was it that I got this thing at 12 years old?

So she talks to her teachers, and she designs a study where she goes to the surgeon who took out the cancer from her liver, takes samples, identifies the genetic profile and the chromosomes that might have led to this particular kind of cancer, writes up the research in *Science* magazine, and now has a scholarship to Harvard to pursue her interest in biomedicine. And as you might imagine, her parents are pretty proud of her. [*Laughter*] I was really proud of her.

But it gives you a sense of the possibilities for young people and young women if somebody is sparking that interest in them and telling them this is something that they can do and they should pursue their interests.

All right. Okay. Young lady right here in the yellow.

Q. Hi, my name is Joelle Stangler. I'm the University of Minnesota student body president. And so I have a question about higher education. And I also have a softball question after this hardball question.

The President. Okay, I'd love the softball question.

Presidential Commencement Addresses/Federal Student Loan Programs/College Affordability

Q. My first question is, the House Republicans recently released their recommendations for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, and so I want to know where you think that Republicans and Democrats can work together and what the top priorities should be for reauthorization. And my softball question is, how do you get a President to be your commencement speaker? Kids want to know. [*Laughter*]

The President. Oh! Well, first of all, you have to invite me. [*Laughter*] So that's always a good start. I just did my last commencement at UC Irvine. I have to say, they had a campuswide letter-writing campaign; I think we ended up getting, like, 10,000 letters, was it, from them, something like that. They also have a very cute mascot. It's an anteater. I guess that's their sign; that's supposed to be the anteater.

Audience member. We've got a gopher.

The President. Gophers are cool. [*Laughter*] Gophers are cool.

So—but the invitation is a good place to start, and then we'll work from there.

In terms of the higher education reauthorization act, that's a big bill, there's a lot of complexities to it. I will just focus on an area that I think should be the focus—and we've already talked about—and that is student loan costs and how we can hold schools more accountable for informing young people, as they're starting their education, what exactly it's going to mean for them.

Now, we've already started this. I mentioned a few things. One thing I didn't mention is the Consumer Finance Protection Board that we set up that, in response to what had happened during the great recession, when people were taking out mortgages they couldn't

afford and predatory lenders were getting folks in a whole lot of trouble. And we said, the same way that you should be protected from a faulty appliance or a faulty car, you should be protected from a faulty financial instrument, make sure it doesn't explode in your face.

And one of the goals of CFPB, is what it's called, was to tackle the student loan issue. And what we've done is created what we call a Know What You Owe program, which pushes colleges and universities not to do the financial counseling on the exit interview where suddenly they hand you a packet and says, here, this is what you're going to owe—hand it to folks at the beginning, break it down for them. And that will allow young people, I think, to make better decisions and their parents to work with them to make better decisions about what college expenses are going to be.

But as I said before—this is true for education generally—the Federal Government can help, but States and local governments have to do their part as well. In public education, the Federal Government accounts for about 7 percent of total costs. The rest of it comes from State and local taxes. And what we've tried to do is leverage the little bit of money that the Federal Government gives to this to modify how—to incentivize reform and to get folks to experiment with new ways of learning.

For example, can we use online classes more effectively to help keep college costs down? Can we get more high school students to get transferable college credits while they're in high school so that they can maybe graduate in 3 years instead of 2? We're trying to encourage folks to experiment in those ways.

All of that, we hope, can get embodied in the Higher Education Act. I will tell you, sometimes if I'm for it, then the other side is against it, even if originally it was their idea. So I can't guarantee you that we'll get bipartisan support for these ideas, but it—there's nothing that should prevent us from doing it because this is just about making a college education a better value for families. And that's something that should transcend party; it shouldn't be a Democrat or a Republican issue. Okay?

All right. Gentleman right here in the uniform.

Q. All right, my name is—well, good afternoon, Mr. President.

The President. Good afternoon.

Job Training Programs/Vocational and Technical Education

Q. My name is John Martinez. I'm a recent EMT graduate from the Freedom House EMS Academy in St. Paul.

The President. Okay, there you go.

Q. Currently, I'm teaching at the Academy, and I just got hired at Allina; I applied for St. Paul Fire. My question is, have you considered starting any other organizations such as the Freedom House for law enforcement or fire or other establishments that could get programs like that going for low-income or minorities?

The President. You know, I'll confess to you I don't know enough about Freedom House, so I'm considering it right now. [Laughter] But you've got to tell me more about it. The—since you're an instructor there and a graduate from there, why don't you tell me how it works?

Q. All right. You go through an interviewing process, and the leaders—there's fire chiefs that interview the candidates. You get paid, but it is an interviewing process. You wear a

uniform; it's a strict program. And it's a 14-week or a 10-week program, depending on what time of the year. It's intensive. Everything is compacted, all the information that we learn. And you learn skills, all the skills that you need to be an EMT. You meet, you network, you meet fire chiefs, police. I know people that are going into med school. It started in 1967 in Philadelphia. And it's been——

The President. Well, it sounds like a great program.

Q. Yes.

The President. And who's eligible for it? Is it young people who have already graduated from high school, but haven't yet gone to college? If I'm 30 years old and I'm thinking, let me try a new career—who is it that can participate?

Q. Anyone from the ages of 17 to 30 is eligible. You have to meet the income requirements. And it's open to anyone who wants to get into EMS or fire.

The President. Well, that's a great idea. Well, see, you just gave me a good idea. [Laughter] All right. So now I'm considering expanding it.

I—it's a good example, though, of a broader issues, which is not everybody is going to go to a 4-year university, but everybody is going to need some advanced training. And so the question is, how do we set up systems—whether it's apprenticeships, whether it's programs like Freedom House that you just described, whether it's through the community colleges—where whatever stage in your life, if you feel as if you're stuck in your existing occupation, you want to do better, or you lose your job and you've got to transition to a new industry, that you are able to get training that fits you. Understanding that for a lot of folks, they may be working at the same time as they are looking after their kids, and so there's got to be some flexibility. The programs have to be more compact. Most importantly, they have to be job training programs that—or technical programs that actually produce the skills you need to get jobs that are there.

And so what we've been trying to do is to—which seems like common sense, but unfortunately, for a long time wasn't done—going to the businesses first that are hiring and ask them, well, what exactly are you looking for, and why don't you work with the community college, or why don't you work with the nonprofit to help design the actual training program so that you'll have the benefit of knowing if somebody has gone through the program, they're prepared for the job? Conversely, the person who's going through the training program, they know, if they complete it, that there's a job at the other end. And that's how we're actually trying to redesign a lot of the job training programs that are out there.

But as I said before, you've also got to make sure that you structure it so that a working mom who can't afford to just quit her job and go to school—she's—maybe she's a waitress right now—she's interested in being a nurse's assistant that has slightly better pay and benefits and then wants to become a nurse, that she has the opportunity to work around her schedule, make sure that we've got the ability to take classes at night or on weekends or online.

That's how, in the future, we're going to have to redesign a lot of this stuff, getting away from thinking that all the training that's going to take place is just for 18- and 19-year-olds who are—who've got all day and are supported by their parents, because that's not the model that our economy is going to be in for the foreseeable future. Okay?

Young lady. Yes, in the stripes.

Wage Equality/Workplace Flexibility Policies

Q. Hi, my name is Erin. I just left a corporation in Minnesota, a Fortune 500 corporation, where I had my 4-year degree, my male counterpart did not, and he was making \$3 more an hour than I was. My question for you is, what are we going to do about it so as I grow up and other women grow up, we are not experiencing the wage gap anymore?

The President. Well, I've got all kinds of opinions on this. [Laughter]

First of all—I told this story at the Working Families Summit—my mom was a single mom. She worked, went to school, raised two kids with the help of my grandparents. And I remember what it was like for her. Coming home, she's dead tired, she's trying to fix a healthy meal for me and my sister, which meant there were only really like five things in the rotation because she didn't have time to be practicing with a whole bunch of stuff. And sometimes, because you're a kid, you're stupid, so you're all like, I don't want to eat that again. [Laughter] And she's like, really? [Laughter] What did you make? Eat your food. [Laughter]

But I remember the struggles that she would go through when she did finally get her advanced degree, got a job, and she'd experience on-the-job discrimination because of her gender.

My grandmother, she was Rosie the Riveter. She—when my grandfather went to fight in World War II, part of Patton's army, she stayed home because my mom was born at—in Kansas, at Fort Leavenworth, and my grandmother worked at a bomber assembly line. And she was whip smart. I mean, she—in another era, she would have ended up running a company. But at the time, she didn't even get her college degree—worked as a secretary. She was smart enough that she worked her way up to be a vice president at the local bank where she—where we lived, which is why sometimes, when I watch *Mad Men*, there's Peggy and Joan, the two women there, I'm always rooting for them because that—I imagine them—that's what it was like for my grandmother, kind of working her way up.

But she, as smart as she was, she got to a certain point, and then she stopped advancing. And then she would train guys how to do the job, and they would end up being her boss. And it happened three or four times.

So this is something that I care a lot about not just because of my past, but also because of my future. I've got two daughters. The idea that they would not be paid the same or not have the same opportunities as somebody's sons is infuriating. And even if you're not a dad, those of you who have partners, spouses—men—this is not a women's issue. Because if they're not getting paid, that means they're not bringing home as much money, which means your family budget is tighter. So this is a family issue and not a gender issue.

So what can we do? First bill I signed was something called the Lilly Ledbetter Act, that allowed folks to sue if they found out that they had been discriminated against, like you found out. Back then, Lilly Ledbetter, this wonderful woman, she had been paid less than her male counterparts for the same job for over a decade. When she finally finds out, she sues, and the Supreme Court says, well, the statute of limitations has run out; you can't sue for all of that backpay. She says, well, I just found out—well, that doesn't matter. So we've reversed that law, allowing people to sue based on when you find out.

Most recently what I did was, we made it against the law, at least for Federal contractors, to retaliate against employees for sharing job—or salary information. Because part of the problem—part of the reason that it's hard to enforce equal pay for equal work is, most employers don't let you talk, or discourage talk, about what everybody else is getting paid. And

what we've said is, women have a right to know what the guy sitting next to them who's doing the exact same job is getting paid. So that's something we were able to do.

But ultimately, we're going to need Congress to act. There have been repeated efforts at us—by us to get what we call the "Paycheck Fairness Act" through Congress, and Republicans have blocked it. Some have denied that it's a problem. What they've said is, you know what, women make different choices. That explains the wage gap. That's the reason that women on average make 77 cents to every dollar that a man earns, is because they're making different choices.

Well, first of all, that's not true in your case, because you were doing the same job. You didn't make a different choice; you just were getting paid less. But let's even unpack this whole idea of making different choices. What they're really saying is, because women have to bear children, so—and a company doesn't give them enough maternity leave or doesn't give them enough flexibility, that they should be punished.

And our whole point is that this is a family issue and that if we structure the workplace to actually be family friendly, which everybody always talks about, but we don't always actually practice, then women won't have to make different choices. Then if they're pregnant and have a child, it's expected that they're going to have some time off. By the way, the dads should too. They should have some flexibility in the workplace. They should be able to take care of a sick kid without getting docked for pay.

And there are some wonderful companies who are doing this. And as I said before, it turns out that when companies adopt family-friendly policies their productivity goes up, they have lower turnover, which makes sense. You—look, if you have a family emergency and you go to your boss and you say, "Can I have a week off? I've got to take care of a sick child or dad," or, "Can I leave early this afternoon because my kid is in a school play and I really think this is important?," and they say, "Of course, nothing is more important than family," how hard are you going to work for that person when you get back on the job? You're going to feel invested in them. You're going to say to yourself, man, these folks care about me, which means I care about you. And if I have to take some extra time on a weekend, or I've got to do some work late at night when I'm not under an emergency situation, I'm going to do that.

So this makes good business sense. But the problem is, is that we haven't done enough to encourage these new models. And this is part of the reason why we did this family summit—we wanted to lift this stuff up, show companies that are doing the right thing, encourage others to adopt the same practices, and maybe get some legislation that incentivizes better policies.

In the meantime, though, if you're doing the same job, you should make the same pay, period, full stop. That should be a basic rule. That shouldn't be subject to confusion.

Let's see, this young man back here, right there.

Climate Change

Q. Good afternoon, Mr. President.

The President. Good afternoon. What's your name?

Q. My name is Quinn Graham. I'm an intern with Right Track. And——

The President. What's Right Track? Tell me about it.

Q. Right Track. It's a youth jobs program through the city of St. Paul.

The President. That's great. Now, what grade are you going into next year?

Q. I'm going to be a senior next year.

The President. Fantastic. How did junior year go?

Q. What?

The President. How did junior year go?

Q. Yes.

The President. It was okay? What do you mean, yes? No, how did junior year go?

Q. Oh, it went well.

The President. It went well?

Q. Sorry. Yes.

The President. Okay. I just wanted—because Malia is going into her junior year, and I hear it's pretty busy your junior year.

Q. Yes.

The President. Yes? Well, you look like you survived it.

Q. Yes.

The President. Okay. You wanted to get to your question. Please go ahead. [*Laughter*]

Q. Yes. I was wondering how you would propose to address the growing issue of climate change.

The President. Well, as it just so happens—now, this young man was not a plant. [*Laughter*] But as it just so happens, last year yesterday, I announced my climate action plan. And let me just set the stage by saying that the science here is settled: Carbon dioxide is released by a whole bunch of manmade activities.

When you release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere it traps heat. We are seeing the highest levels of carbon dioxide and, as a consequence, some of the warmest temperatures that we've seen in hundreds of thousands of years. They're going up. And this is not just a problem of polar bears—although, I really like polar bears—and the ice caps melting. What happens is, is that when temperatures on average go up, it throws weather patterns into a whole bunch of different directions.

So it may mean that snowcaps on mountains diminish. And out West, entire States get their water from snowcaps. If you're not getting the same amount of water, you now have the potential for more severe drought. Agriculture is impacted, which means your food bills go up. California is going through the worst drought it's gone through in a very, very long time. That raises the price of all the fruits and vegetables that are grown in California, so it hits you in your pocketbook.

Wildfires may increase. And in fact, we've seen record wildfires. We're having to spend more money fighting fires now than we ever have. It makes hurricanes potentially more frequent and potentially more powerful. So Hurricane Sandy may not be as unusual as it used to be. You see higher incidents of flooding. Coastal States like Florida, there are neighborhoods where now, every time there's a high tide, there's a flood in these neighborhoods.

And the problem is, it's getting worse. Because as folks in China and India and other places decide they want to have cars too, and they want to have electricity and the things that we've got, they start building more power plants, and they start driving more and all of that adds to more carbon dioxide, and it starts compounding.

So this is something we have to deal with. Now, the good news is, there are things we can do. So we doubled fuel efficiency standards on cars. By the middle of the next decade, cars and trucks are going to go twice as far on a gallon of gas. That's going to save you money in your pocketbook, but it's also taking carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere.

We've invested in clean energy. Since I came into office, we're producing three times as much energy through wind power, and we're producing about 10 times as much energy through solar power, and we're creating jobs here in the United States: folks installing wind turbines and solar panels. So it's good economics, and it's also good for the environment.

Most recently, what I've done is, I've said—about 40 percent of the carbon that we emit comes from power plants. So what we've said is, we're—through the Environmental Protection Agency—we're going to set standards. We set standards for the amount of mercury and arsenic and sulfur that's pumped out by factories and power plants into our air and our water. Right now we don't have a cap on the amount of carbon pollution. So we said we're going to cap it.

And we're going to let States work with their private sector and local governments to come up with what's going to be best for them. Not every State is going to do the same thing. Nevada might emphasize solar power. South Dakota might emphasize wind power. Whatever it is that you're going to do, you've got to start bringing down your carbon pollution.

Now, this has some controversy. Oil companies, not wild about it; coal companies, not crazy about it. These traditional sources of fuel—fossil fuels—we're going to use for a while, but we can't just keep on using them forever. We've got to develop new ways of producing energy so that your generation isn't seeing a planet that is starting to break down, with all the costs associated with it.

Last point I'll make: One of the benefits of asking power plants to produce energy that's cleaner is, it—when they control their carbon dioxide, they're also putting less soot in the air. They're also putting less particulates in the air. And what that means is your child is less likely to get asthma and those with respiratory diseases are less likely to be impacted. So it has a public health effect that is good as well.

We can have an environment that is cleaner, that is healthy for us, and at the same time, develop entire new industries in clean energy. But we're going to have to get started now. And that's why, despite some of the pushback from some of the special interests out there, we're going to just keep on going at this, and—because we don't have a choice. This is something that we're going to have to tackle during this generation to make sure we're giving a good future for the next generation. All right? Great question.

Last question, last question. This young lady in the pink. Go ahead.

Federal Employees/Federal Government Shutdown/Federal Budget/Deficit and National Debt/Iraq

Q. Good afternoon, Mr. President.

The President. Good afternoon.

Q. My name is Katie Peterson. And my coworker here and friend, we've been working for the Federal Government for almost 29 years. And we feel really privileged that we've been able to serve that way.

The President. Where do you work?

Q. For Defense Contract Management Agency.

The President. Excellent.

Q. And—but it's been a great career, and we love it. But lately, as you know, there's been a few rough patches, with 3 years of pay freeze and sequestration and furloughs. And we're just kind of wondering what you foresee for the next, like, fiscal year as—for Government workers.

The President. Well, let me make a couple of points. First of all, folks in the Federal Government, the overwhelming majority, they work really hard doing really important stuff. And I don't know why it is that—[*applause*]
—I don't know when it was that somehow working for government—whether at the State or local or Federal level—somehow became not a real job. When you listen to some of the Republican rhetoric sometimes, you think, well, this is really important work that we depend on.

We've got floods right here, right now. The Federal Government is coming in, and it's going to be working with local communities that are overwhelmed to try to make sure that people get help rebuilding. Those are Federal workers. If they weren't around after a tornado or a hurricane, communities would be in a world of hurt.

When you check the weather, even on your smartphone, that information didn't just come from some Silicon Valley office. That came from the National Weather Service. We put out the data developed by the Federal Government through our satellites that are paid for, and then, it's commercialized. And people use it to set up things like the Weather Channel and weather.com and websites.

The folks who help our men and women in uniform make sure that they've got proper equipment, those are Federal workers. Fighting fires, a lot of times those are Federal workers in the Forest Service.

So it frustrates me when I hear people acting as if somebody who's working for the Federal Government somehow is less than somebody working in the private sector. If they're doing a good job and carrying on an important function, we should praise them.

The same is true, by the way, at the local level. [*Applause*] The same is true at the local level. I don't know a job more important than teaching. Those are all government workers. In fact, one of the biggest problems we had in coming out of this recession, in addition to it being the worst recession since the Great Depression, was that States and local governments were cutting back on their hiring at an unprecedented rate. We still haven't seen State and local government hiring get back to where it was back in 2007, 2008. If we had, if we hadn't lost so many teachers and teachers' aides in a lot of communities, the unemployment rate would be much lower, and the economy would be much stronger.

So I say all this just to make a general point, which is, historically, it's been the private sector that drove the economy, but it was also a whole bunch of really great work done by agricultural extension workers and engineers at NASA and researchers at our labs that helped to create the platform and the wealth that we enjoy. And so this whole idea that somehow government is the enemy or the problem is just not true.

Now, are there programs that the Government does that are a waste of money or aren't working as well as they should be? Of course. But I tell you, if you work in any company in America, big company, you'll find some things that they're doing that aren't all that efficient either. Are there some Federal workers who do boneheaded things? Absolutely. I remember the first week I was on the job, I talked to my Defense Secretary, Bob Gates, who's older and had been there a long time. I said, do you have advice for me, Bob? He says, one thing you should know, Mr. President, is that at any given moment, on any given day, somebody in the Federal Government is screwing up. [*Laughter*] Which is true, because there are 2 million employees. Somebody out there—if 99 percent of the folks are doing the right thing and only 1 percent aren't, that's still a lot of people.

So my job as President, working with Congress, is to make sure taxpayer dollars are spent wisely and efficiently. We shouldn't be wasting a dime. And where we see waste, where we see things not working the way they should—like recently, these long waits for folks trying to get in the VA health care program—we've got to crack down, and we've got to reform it. But we can't paint in a broad brush and just say somehow stuff is not working. Because even in the VA health care system, once people get in, the quality of care, the satisfaction rates for customers are actually better than in private sector health care. So we can't generalize like this.

Now, the last point I'll make—going to your question—Federal workers generally have not gotten raises. And you remember during the Government shutdown, they were getting pressed—having to pay bills like everybody else, but not having a paycheck coming in. It's very disruptive for them. And these—what's called sequestration and furloughs meant that they might only be able to come to work 3 days a week instead of the full 5. And this all put a strain on their budgets.

We've been able to stabilize it, but when we go into the budget talks with Republicans next year, we may go through some of the same problems, in part because the other side has said they want to cut funding for education; they've said that they want to cut support for vulnerable families; they want to cut Medicaid, which would have an impact on the elderly and families that have folks with disabilities. And I've said no.

I've said why would I—by the way, the deficit has come down by more than half since I came into office. It hasn't gone up. Federal spending has not gone up. The deficit has gone down. And if we want to do more to reduce the deficit further, why am I going to take it out on the most vulnerable in our society and programs we need to grow when we've got a tax system where you've got corporations taking advantage of loopholes—in some cases, they're paying no taxes, when a teacher or a secretary are paying taxes themselves? Why wouldn't I close those loopholes first to generate additional revenues before I started cutting education spending or spending on basic research?

It will be a tough negotiation just because everything is a tough negotiation in Washington right now, which, I guess, brings me just to my last point. I don't watch TV news generally, or cable shows, but I suspect, if you're out here and going to work and picking up your kids and taking them to soccer, or at night sitting there paying the bills, and you just turn on the TV, sometimes, it must feel kind of discouraging because it doesn't feel like what's being talked about in Washington has anything to do with what's going on in your lives day to day. And it must feel as if sometimes you're just forgotten.

And sometimes, the news that's being reported on is really important. I mean, what's happening in Iraq is relevant. We've got to pay attention to the threats that are emanating from the chaos in the Middle East. Although, I want to be very clear we're not sending combat

troops into Iraq, because that's—[*applause*]*—*we've done that, and we've given them an opportunity. And they're going to have to contribute to solving their own problems here. Although, we'll protect our people, and we'll make sure that we're going after terrorists who could do us harm.

But sometimes the news that's coming off is just—these are just Washington fights. They're fabricated issues. They're phony scandals that are generated. It's all geared towards the next election or ginning up a base. It's not on the level. And that must feel frustrating, and it makes people cynical, and it makes people turned off from the idea that anything can get done.

And if I've got one message today, it's the same message that I gave to that young mom that I mentioned who I had lunch with before I came here, who wrote me a letter just talking about how she had done everything right, her and her husband, and she's working hard and raising two beautiful kids, and she has a great life, but it's a struggle, and wondering if anybody in Washington knows it. What I told her is the same thing I want to tell all of you, which is, I know it. You're the reason I ran for office. You're—[*applause*]*—*no, no, I'm not looking for applause. I want to make this point. I grew up not in tough circumstances, but I was you guys. Somebody out here is going through what my mom went through. Somebody out here is growing through what my grandma went through. Somebody out here is going through what Michelle and I went through when we were first married and our kids were first born. It's not like I forget. That was just 20 years ago that we were trying to figure out how to buy our first home. It was just 10 years ago when we finished off paying our student loans.

You guys are the reason I ran. You're who I'm thinking about every single day. And just because it's not reported in the news, I don't want you to think that I'm not fighting for you. And I'm not always going to get it done as fast as I want, because right now we've got a Congress that's dysfunctional. And I'll be honest with you, you've got a party on the other side whose only rationale—motivation seems to be opposing me.

But despite all that, we're making progress. Despite all that, some folks have health care that didn't have it before. Despite all that, some students are able to afford their education better. Despite all that, some folks have jobs that didn't have it. Despite all that, the Green Line got built here in Minnesota. Despite all that, we can make life a little better for American families who are doing their best, working hard, meeting their responsibilities.

And I don't want you to ever forget that. And I don't want you to be cynical. Cynicism is popular these days, but hope is better.

Thanks, everybody. All right. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:24 p.m. at Minnehaha Park. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Christopher B. Coleman of St. Paul, MN; Mayor Betsy A. Hodges of Minneapolis, MN; St. Anthony, MN, resident Rebekah Erler, her husband Ben Erler, and their sons Jack and Henry; 2014 White House Science Fair participant Elana Simon of New York City and her parents Sanford Simon and Rachael Migler; and Lilly Ledbetter, former employee, Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company plant in Gadsden, AL. He also referred to his sister Maya Soetoro-Ng.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Minneapolis, MN, town hall meeting and question-and-answer session.

Locations: Minneapolis, MN.

Names: Coleman, Christopher B.; Dayton, Mark B.; Ellison, Keith M.; Erler, Henry; Erler, Jack; Erler, Rebekah; Gates, Robert M.; Graham, Quinn; Hodges, Betsy A.; Ledbetter, Lilly; Migler, Rachael; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Simon, Elana; Simon, Sanford; Soetoro-Ng, Maya; Warren, Elizabeth.

Subjects: Brazil : 2014 World Cup; Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Business and industry : Manufacturing industry :: Advanced manufacturing, promotion efforts; Business and industry : Wage discrimination; California : Severe drought, damage and recovery efforts; Civil rights : Wage equality; Civil rights : Women's rights and gender equality; Connecticut : 2013 shootings in Newtown; Consumer Financial Protection Bureau; Diseases : Asthma and respiratory illnesses; Economy, national : Household incomes, decline; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Foreign exchange programs; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Education : Postsecondary education :: Career training and continuing education; Education : Postsecondary education :: Community colleges; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, interest rates and refinancing; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, repayment options; Education : Science and math programs; Education : Teachers; Education : Vocational and technical education programs; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: U.S. production; Energy : Developing countries, energy sources; Energy : Fuel efficiency standards, strengthening efforts; Energy : Greenhouse gas emissions, regulation; Environment : Carbon emissions; Environment : Climate change; Government organization and employees : Funding lapse and partial furlough; Homeland Security, Department of : Emergency Management Agency, Federal; Iraq : Political unrest and violence; Labor issues : Minimum wage; Labor issues : Workplace flexibility, improvement efforts; Law enforcement and crime : Gun control; Law enforcement and crime : Gun violence, prevention efforts; Minnesota : Floods, damage and recovery efforts; Minnesota : Governor; Minnesota : President's visits; Natural disasters : Wildfires, prevention and response efforts; Science and technology : Research and development; Sports : World Cup; Taxation : Tax Code, reform; Veterans Affairs, Department of : Veterans Health Administration; White House Office : Science and Technology Policy, White House Office of.

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