

*Administration of Barack Obama, 2014*

**Remarks in Minneapolis, Minnesota**

*June 27, 2014*

*The President.* Hello, Minneapolis! How is everybody doing today? You look good. It is good to see all of you. I miss Minneapolis. I missed you guys. Go ahead and have a seat, I'm going to be talking for a while. [*Laughter*]

So we've got some wonderful folks here today. I want to acknowledge a few of them. First of all, your outstanding Governor, Mark Dayton. Your wonderful Senators, Al Franken and Amy Klobuchar. Congressman Keith Ellison. Your mayor, Betsy Hodges. And all of you are here, and that's special.

I want to thank Rebekah for not just the introduction and for sharing her story, but for letting me hang out with her and her family for the last couple of days. I really like her. [*Laughter*] I—and her husband is, like, the husband of the year. Generally, you don't want your wife to meet Rebekah's husband, because she'll be, like, well, why don't you do that? [*Laughter*] Why aren't you like that?

I've been wanting to visit a place where all the women are strong and the men are good looking and the children above average. And this clearly is an example of what Minnesota produces. So yesterday Rebekah and I had lunch at Matt's Bar. Yes, had a "Jucy Lucy," which was quite tasty. We had a town hall at Minnehaha Park, although I did not take a kayak over the falls, which seemed dangerous. [*Laughter*] We got ice cream at Grand Ole Creamery—very good, very tasty.

And then this morning Al Franken and I and Secretary Tom Perez, our Secretary of Labor, who's here—Tom, stand up—[*applause*]*—*we stopped by a community organization that helps with a lot of job programs and job placement programs. And this program in particular was focused on young moms. It was really interesting talking to them, because these are teenage mothers, 16 to 18, and it was a great pleasure for me to be able to say to all of them that my mom was a teenage mom and she was 18 when she had me and to be able to say to all of them that here in this country, it is possible for the child of a teenage mom, a single mom, to end up being President of the United States. And I think that it maybe gave them something to think about.

So you guys have been great hosts, Minnesota.

*Audience member.* Yeah! Thank you!

*The President.* You're welcome. [*Laughter*]

*Audience member.* We love you!

*The President.* I love you back. [*Laughter*]

Now, so I want to give you a sense of how this visit came up. As some of you know, every day we get tens of thousands of correspondence at the White House. And we have a big correspondence office, and every night, the folks who manage the correspondence office select 10 letters for me to read.

And the job of these letters is not to just puff me up, so it's not like they only send me letters saying, Mr. President, you're doing great. [*Laughter*] Sometimes, the letters say thank

you for something I may have done. Sometimes, the letters say, you are an idiot and the worst President ever. And most of the stories, though, are stories of hardship or hard-won success or hopes that haven't been met yet. Some appreciate a position that I may have taken; some disagree with what I'm doing. Some consider policies like the Affordable Care Act to be socialism; some tell stories about the difference that same policy may have made in folks' lives.

So I'm getting a good sample of what's happening around the country. And last month, three young girls wrote to me that boys aren't fair because they don't pass the ball in gym class. [*Laughter*] So there's a wide spectrum—and I'm going to prepare an Executive order on that.

But the letter that Rebekah sent stood out, first of all, because she's a good writer, and also because she's a good person. And the story that she told me reminded Michelle and I of some of our own experiences when we were their—Rebekah and her husband's age. And in many ways, her story for the past 5 years is our story, it's the American story.

In early 2009, Rebekah and Ben, her husband, they were newly married, expecting their first son Jack. She was waiting tables; he was in construction. Like millions of middle class families who got hammered by the great recession—the worst recession since the Great Depression—life was about to get pretty hard. "If only we had known," she wrote, "what was about to happen to the housing and construction market."

Ben's business dried up. But as a new husband and dad, he did what he had to, so he took whatever jobs he could, even if it forced him to be away from his family for days at a time. Rebekah realized she needed to think about how her career would unfold, so she took out student loans and enrolled in St. Paul College and retrained for a new career as an accountant.

And it's been a long, hard road for them. They had to pay off debt. They had to sacrifice for their kids and for one another. But then last year, they were able to buy their first home, and they've got a second son. And they love where they work, and Ben's new job lets him to be home for dinner each night. And so what Rebekah wrote was: "It's amazing what you can bounce back from when you have to. We're a strong, tight-knit family who has made it through some very, very hard times."

And that describes the American people. We too are a strong, tight-knit family who has made it through some very, very hard times. And today, over the past 51 months, our businesses have created 9.4 million new jobs. Our housing market is rebounding. Our auto industry is booming. Our manufacturing sector is adding jobs for the first time since the 1990s. We've made our Tax Code fairer. We've cut our deficits by more than half. More than 8 million Americans have signed up for private insurance plans through the Affordable Care Act. So here in Minnesota, you can now say that the women are strong, the men are good looking, the children are above average, and 95 percent of you are insured.

And it's thanks to the hard work of citizens like Rebekah and Ben and so many of you that we've come farther, we've recovered faster, than just about any other advanced economy on Earth. More and more companies are deciding that the world's number-one place to create jobs and invest is once again the United States of America. That's the good news. And you don't hear it very often.

By every economic measure, we are better off now than we were when I took office. You wouldn't know it, but we are. We've made some enormous strides. But that's not the end of the story. We have more work to do.

It wasn't the end of Rebekah's story, because she went on to write in her letter, "We did everything right. The truth is, in America, where two people have done everything they can to succeed and fight back from the brink of financial ruin—through job loss and retraining and kids and credit card debts that are set up to keep you impoverished forever and the discipline to stop spending any money on yourselves or take a vacation in 5 years—it's virtually impossible to live a simple middle class life." That's what Rebekah wrote. Because their income is eaten up by childcare for Jack and Henry that costs more each month than their mortgage. And as I was telling Rebekah, Michelle and I, when we were their age, we had good jobs, and we still had to deal with childcare issues and couldn't figure out how to some months make ends meet.

They forego vacations so they can afford to pay off student loans and save for retirement. "Our big splurge," Rebekah wrote, "is cable TV so we can follow our beloved Minnesota Wild and watch Team U.S.A. in the Olympics!" They go out once a week for pizza or a burger. But they're not splurging. And at the end of the month, things are tight. And this is, like, this wonderful young couple, with these wonderful kids, who are really working hard.

And the point is, all across this country, there are people just like that, all in this audience. You're working hard, you're doing everything right. You believe in the American Dream. You're not trying to get fabulously wealthy. You just wanted a chance to build a decent life for yourselves and your families, but sometimes, it feels like the odds are rigged against you.

And I think sometimes what it takes for somebody like Rebekah to sit down and write one of these letters. And I believe that even when it's heartbreaking and it's hard, every single one of those letters is by definition an act of hope.

Because it's a hope that the system can listen, that somebody is going to hear you; that even when Washington sometimes seems tone deaf to what's going on in people's lives and around kitchen tables, that there's going to be somebody who's going to stand up for you and your family.

And that's why I came here, because I wanted to let Rebekah know and I wanted to let all of you know that—because you don't see it on TV sometimes. It's not what the press and the pundits talk about. I'm here to tell you I'm listening, because you're the reason I ran for President. Because those stories are stories I've lived. The same way that when I saw those young teenage moms, I thought of my mother. And when I see Rebekah and Ben, I think of our struggles when Malia and Sasha were young. And they're not distant from me and everything we do.

I ran for President because I believe this country is at its best when we're all in it together and when everybody has a fair shot and everybody is doing their fair share. And the reason I believe that is because that's how I came here. That's how I got here. That's how Michelle and I were able to succeed. And I haven't forgotten.

And so even though you may not read about it or see it on TV all the time, our agenda, what we're fighting for every day, is designed not to solve every problem, but to help just a little bit. To create more good jobs that pay good wages, jobs in manufacturing and construction and energy and innovation. That's why we're fighting to train more workers to fill those jobs. That's why we're fighting to guarantee every child a world-class education, including early childhood education and better childcare. That's why we're fighting to make sure hard work pays off with a wage you can live on and savings you can retire on and making sure that women get paid the same as men for the same job and folks have flexibility to look after a sick child or a sick parent.

That's what we're fighting for. We're fighting so everybody has a chance. We're fighting to vindicate the idea that no matter who you are or what you look like or how you grew up or who you love or who your parents were or what your last name is, it doesn't matter; America is a place where if you're doing the right thing, like Ben and Rebekah are, and you're being responsible and you're taking care of your family, that you can make it.

And the fact is, we can do that. If we do the—some basic things, if we make some basic changes, we can create more jobs and lift more incomes and strengthen the middle class. And that's what we should be doing. And I know it drives you nuts that Washington isn't doing it. And it drives me nuts. And the reason it's not getting done is, today, even basic, commonsense ideas can't get through this Congress.

No—and sometimes, I'm supposed to be politic about how I say things—[*laughter*]—but I'm finding lately that I just want to say what's on my mind. So let me just be clear—think—I want you think about this: So far this year, Republicans in Congress have blocked or voted down every single serious idea to strengthen the middle class. Now, you may think I'm exaggerating; let me go through the list. They've said no to raising the minimum wage. They've said no to fair pay. Some of them have denied that there's even a problem, that—despite the fact that women are getting paid 77 cents for every dollar a man is getting paid.

They've said no to extending unemployment insurance for more than 3 million Americans who are out there looking every single day for a new job, despite the fact that we know it would be good not just for those families who are working hard to try to get back on their feet, but for the economy as a whole. Rather than invest in working families getting ahead, they actually voted to give another massive tax cut to the wealthiest Americans.

*Audience members.* Boo!

*The President.* They—don't boo, by the way. I want you to vote. But—[*laughter*]. I mean, over and over again, they show that they'll do anything to keep in place systems that really help folks at the top, but don't help you. And they don't seem to mind. And their obstruction is keeping a system that is rigged against families like Ben's and Rebekah's.

Now, I'm not saying these are all bad people; they're not. I—when I'm sitting there just talking to them about family, we get along just fine. Many of them will acknowledge when I talk to them, "Yes, I know, I wish we could do something more, but I can't." But they can't be too friendly towards me because they'd be run out of town by the Tea Party. [*Laughter*]

But sometimes, I get a sense, they just don't know what most folks are going through. They keep on offering a theory of the economy that's, time and again, failed for the middle class. They think we should give more tax breaks to those at the top. They think we should invest less in things like education. They think we should let big banks and credit card companies and polluters and insurers do only whatever is best for their bottom line without any responsibility to anybody else. They want to drastically reduce or get rid of the safety net for people trying to work their way into the middle class.

And if we did all these things, they think the economy will thrive and jobs will prosper and everything will trickle down.

And just because they believe it, it doesn't mean the rest of us should be believing it, because we've tried what they're peddling, and it doesn't work. We know from our history that our economy does not grow from the top down, it grows from the middle out. We do better when the middle class does better. We do better when workers are getting a decent salary. We

do better when they've got decent benefits. We do better when some—we do better when a young family knows that they can get ahead. And we do better when people who are working hard know that they can count on decent childcare at an affordable cost and that they, if they get sick, they're not going to lose their homes.

We do better when if somebody is stuck in a job that is not paying well enough, they know they can go get retrained without taking on huge mountains of debt. That's when things hum. And with just a few changes in priorities, we could get a lot of that done right now if Congress would actually just think about you and not about getting reelected, not about the next election, not about some media sound bite, but just focus on you.

So that's why I've said, look, I want to work with Democrats and Republicans. My favorite President, by the way, is—was the first Republican President, a guy named Abraham Lincoln. So I'm not—this is not a statement about partisanship. This is a statement about America and what we're fighting for. And I'm not going to let gridlock and inaction and willful indifference and greed threaten the hard work of families like yours. And so we can't afford to wait for Congress right now. And that's why I'm going ahead and moving ahead without them wherever I can.

That's why I acted to raise more workers' wages by requiring Federal contractors to pay their employees a fair wage of at least \$10.10 an hour. That's why I acted to help nearly 5 million Americans make student loan payments cap those payments at 10 percent of their income. That's why I made sure more women have the protections they need to fight for a fair pay in the workplace. That's why we went ahead and launched new hubs to attract more high-tech manufacturing jobs to America.

And now, some of you may have read—so we take these actions, and then now Republicans are mad at me for taking these actions. They're not doing anything, and then they're mad that I'm doing something. I'm not sure which of the things I've done they find most offensive, but they've decided they're going to sue me for doing my job.

*Audience member. [Inaudible]*

*The President. [Laughter]* I mean, I might have said in the heat of the moment during one of these debates, "I want to raise the minimum wage, so sue me when I do." *[Laughter]* But I didn't think they were going to take it literally.

But giving more working Americans a fair shot is not about simply what I can do, it's about what we can do together. So when Congress doesn't act, not only have I acted, I've also tried to rally others to help. I told CEOs and Governors and mayors and State legislatures, for example, they don't have to wait for Congress to raise the minimum wage. Go ahead and raise your workers' wages right now. And since I first asked Congress to raise the minimum wage, 13 States and DC have raised theirs, including Minnesota, where more than 450,000 of your neighbors are poised to get a raise.

When Gap raised wages for its employees, job applications went up through the roof. It was good for business. I even got a letter from a proud mom right here in Minneapolis who just wanted me to know that her son starts his employees at \$15 an hour, at Aaron's Green Cleaning here in town. *[Applause]* There they are! So here—the letter said: "We are very proud of his people-centered business philosophy! Three cheers for a decent living wage!"

So we don't have to wait for Congress to do some good stuff. On Monday, we held the first-ever White House Summit on Working Families, and we heard from a lot of other families

like Ben and Rebekah. They count on policies like paid leave and workplace flexibility to juggle everything. We had business owners who came and told me they became more profitable when they made family life easier for their employees.

So more companies are deciding that higher wages and workplace flexibility is good for business: reduces turnover, more productive workers, more loyal workers. More cities and States are deciding, this is good policy for families. So the only holdout standing in the way of change for tens of millions of Americans are some Republicans in Congress.

So—because I just want to be real blunt: If you watch the news, you'd just see, okay, Washington is a mess, and the basic attitude is, everybody is just crazy up there. And—but if you actually read the fine print, it turns out that the things you care about, right now Democrats are promoting. And we're just not getting enough help.

And my message to Republicans is: Join us. Get on board. If you're mad at me for helping people on my own, then why don't you join me and we'll do it together? *[Applause]* We'll do it together. I'm happy to share the credit. You're mad at me for doing some things to raise the minimum wage, let's pass a law, Republicans and Democrats giving America a raise.

If you're mad at me for taking executive action to make it easier for women to find out if they're not getting treated fairly in the workplace, let's do it together. You can share the credit. You're worried about me trying to fix a broken immigration system, let's hold hands and go ahead and make sure that this country continues to be a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants. I want to work with you, but you've got to give me something. You've got to try to deliver something, anything.

They don't do anything—*[laughter]*—except block me. And call me names. And it can't be that much fun. *[Laughter]* It'd be so much more fun if they said, you know what, let's do something together. If they were more interested in growing the economy for you and the issues that you're talking about, instead of trying to mess with me—*[laughter]*—then we'd be doing a lot better. That's what makes this country great, is when we're all working together. That's the American way.

Now more than ever, with the Fourth of July next week, Team U.S.A. moving on down in Brazil, we should try to rally around some economic patriotism that says we rise or fall as one Nation and one people. Let's rally around the idea that instead of giving tax breaks for millionaires, let's give more tax breaks for working families to help pay for childcare or college.

Instead of protecting companies that are shifting profits overseas to avoid paying their fair share, let's put people to work rebuilding our roads and our bridges and our airports. Let's invest in manufacturing startups so that we're creating good jobs making products here in America, here in Minnesota. Rather than stack the deck in favor of those who have already got an awful lot, let's help folks who have huge talent and potential and ingenuity, but just need a little bit of a hand up so that we can tap the potential of every American.

I mean, this isn't rocket science. So there are some things that are complicated; this isn't one of them. Let's make sure every 4-year-old in America has access to high school—high-quality preschool, so that moms like Rebekah and dads like Ben know their kids are getting the best quality care and getting a head start on life. Let's redesign our high schools to make sure that our kids are better prepared for the 21st-century economy. Let's follow the lead of Senator Franken and Secretary Perez and give more apprenticeships that connect young people to rewarding careers.

Let's tell every American, if they've lost their job because it was shipped overseas, we're going to train you for an even better one. Let's rally around the patriotism that says our country is stronger when every American can count on affordable health insurance and Medicare and Social Security and women earn pay equal to their efforts and family can make ends meet if their kid gets sick and when nobody who works full time is living in poverty. We can do all these things.

And so let me just—let me wrap up by saying this. I know sometimes things get kind of discouraging. And I know that our politics looks profoundly broken and Washington looks like it's never going to deliver for you. It seems like they're focused on everything but your concerns. And I know that when I was elected in 2008 and then reelected in 2012, so many of you were hoping that we could get Washington to work differently, and sometimes, when I get stymied, you'd think, oh, maybe not; maybe it's just too tough, maybe things won't change. And I get that frustration. And the critics and the cynics in Washington, they've written me off more times than I can count.

But I'm here to tell you, don't get cynical. Despite all of the frustrations, America is making progress. Despite the unyielding opposition, there are families who have health insurance now who didn't have it before. And there are students in college who couldn't afford it before. And there are workers on the job who didn't have jobs before. And there are troops home with their families after serving tour after tour. Don't think that we're not making progress.

So yes, it's easy to be cynical; in fact, these days it's kind of trendy. Cynicism passes off for wisdom. But cynicism doesn't liberate a continent. Cynicism doesn't build a transcontinental railroad. Cynicism doesn't send a man to the Moon. Cynicism doesn't invent the Internet. Cynicism doesn't give women the right to vote. Cynicism doesn't make sure that people are treated equally regardless of race.

Cynicism is a choice, and hope is a better choice. And every day, I'm lucky to receive thousands of acts of hope, every time somebody sits down and picks up a pen and writes to me and shares their story, just like Rebekah did. And Rebekah said in her letter—she ended it, she said: "I'm pretty sure this is a silly thing to do to write a letter to the President, but on some level, I know that staying silent about what you see and what needs changing never makes any difference. So I'm writing to you to let you know what it's like for us out here in the middle of the country, and I hope you will listen."

And I'm here because Rebekah wrote to me and I want her to know I'm listening. I'm here as President, because I want you all to know that I'm listening. I ran for office to make sure that anybody who is working hard to meet their dreams has somebody in Washington that is listening. And I'm always going to keep listening. And I'm always going to keep fighting.

And your cares and your concerns are my own, and your hopes for your kids and your grandkids are my own. And I'm always going to be working to restore the American Dream for everybody who's willing to work for it. And I am not going to get cynical; I'm staying hopeful, and I hope you do too.

Thank you. God bless you. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:15 a.m. at the Lake Harriet Band Shell. In his remarks, he referred to Minneapolis, MN, resident Rebekah Erler, her husband Ben Erler, and their sons Jack and Henry; and Aaron Barnell, founder, Aaron's Green Cleaning.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Minneapolis, MN.

*Locations:* Minneapolis, MN.

*Names:* Barnell, Aaron; Dayton, Mark B.; Ellison, Keith M.; Erler, Ben; Erler, Henry; Erler, Jack; Erler, Rebekah; Franken, Al; Hodges, Betsy A.; Klobuchar, Amy J.; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Perez, Thomas E.

*Subjects:* Business and industry : Manufacturing industry :: Advanced manufacturing, promotion efforts; Civil rights : Wage equality; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Income inequality, increase; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Early childhood education programs; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, repayment options; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment insurance; Government organization and employees : Federal Government contracting policies, reform; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Labor issues : Minimum wage; Labor issues : Workplace flexibility, improvement efforts; Labor, Department of : Secretary; Minnesota : Governor; Minnesota : Minneapolis :: Matt's Bar & Grill; Minnesota : President's visits; Minnesota : St. Paul :: Grand Ole Creamery ice cream shop; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts .

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