

Barack Obama: On America, Democracy, and International Security

*Memorable Words of the 44th President of the
United States from His Speeches
January 2009–January 2017*



Compiled and Edited by M. Merrick Yamamoto
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SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY
CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL &
SECURITY STUDIES AT MARYLAND

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Preface

In this study are thoughts from Barack Obama about America and the American people; democracy and individual rights; effective government; the economy and the environment; international security; and young people and success in life. Drawn from his speeches as the 44th President of the United States 2009–2017, the thoughts reflect his knowledge and experience gained from a lifetime of service to community and country. By building on his wisdom you can gain a deeper insight into many problems, and their solutions. The thoughts of Barack Obama are an invaluable legacy that can help us meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Notes: In order to try to express President Obama's thoughts on each subject in a way that would be both meaningful and concise, many of the excerpts in this study came from more than one speech. Each selection is footnoted to show the speech or speeches from which the thoughts were drawn, and all speeches and excerpts can be found in the *Public Papers of the Presidents*. Though most of the selections are verbatim transcripts of President Obama's words, in a number of cases minor editorial changes have been made, and most ellipses were omitted for the sake of readability. Italics in the main text, and all underlining, were added.

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I. America

America and Freedom

Freedom

We are the first nation to be founded for the sake of an idea: the idea of the liberty of individual human beings endowed with certain God-given rights. We believe in the right of all people to be treated equally, to have an equal shot at success—that each of us deserves the chance to shape our own destiny. That is in our DNA, the basic premise of democracies.¹

The beating heart of our American idea, our bold experiment in self-government, is the conviction that we are all created equal, endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights, among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We were founded upon a belief in human dignity, that no matter who you are or where you come from or what you look like or what religion you practice, you are equal in the eyes of God and equal in the eyes of the law. The most evident of truths—that all of us are created equal—is the star that guides us still.²

What a great gift our Founders gave to us: the freedom to chase our individual dreams through our toil and imagination, and the imperative to strive together as well, to achieve *a common good, a greater good*. We may have differences in policy, but we all believe in the rights enshrined in our Constitution, including the belief that all men and women are in fact created equal, that each individual is possessed with a dignity and inalienable rights that cannot be denied. Our Founding Fathers, faced with perils that we can scarcely imagine, drafted a charter to assure the rule of law and the rights of man, a charter expanded by the blood of generations. Those ideals still light the world.³

Our most ancient values and enduring ideals: the freedoms and values that we share.
– Barack Obama, Jan. 21, 2013;
May 23, 2012

¹ Jan. 25, 2011; Sept. 20, 2016; June 29, 2016.

² Jan. 10, 2017; Dec. 6, 2015; Jan. 21, 2013.

³ Jan. 10, 2017; Jan. 25, 2011; Sept. 24, 2013; Jan. 20, 2009.

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The Expansion of Freedom

Our Nation began with a promise of freedom that applied only to the few. But because of our democratic Constitution, because of our Bill of Rights, because of our ideals, ultimately those ideals won out. America is a country that has steadily worked to address our problems, to make our Union more perfect, to bridge the divides that existed at the founding of this Nation. America is not the same as it was 100 years ago or 50 years ago or even a decade ago. As an African American, I will never forget that I would not be here today without the steady pursuit of a more perfect union in my country. And that guides my belief that *no matter how dark the day may seem, transformative change can be forged by those who choose to side with justice.*⁴

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, “*The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.*” *It bends towards justice. I believe that. But I also believe that the arc of our Nation, the arc of the world, does not bend towards justice or freedom or equality or prosperity on its own. It depends on us, on the choices we make.* For more than 200 years, we have placed our collective shoulder to the wheel of progress: to create and build and expand the possibilities of individual achievement, to free other nations from tyranny and fear, to promote justice and fairness and equality under the law so that the words set to paper by our Founders are made real for every citizen.⁵

Here in America, our success should depend not on accident of birth, but the strength of our work ethic and the scope of our dreams. We are true to our creed when a little girl born into the bleakest poverty knows that she has the same chance to succeed as anybody else because she is an American; she is free and she is equal, not just in the eyes of God, but also in our own. While the means will change, our purpose endures: a nation that rewards the effort and determination of every single American. That is what will give real meaning to our creed.⁶

I want all of you to be part of the process of helping all our young people achieve their God-given potential. As President, my job is to make sure every child in America gets that chance. Deval Patrick’s job [as governor of Massachusetts] is to make sure that everybody in the Commonwealth gets that chance. And Mayor Joseph Petty, his focus is making sure everybody in this town gets that chance. If more communities invest in young people like you, if you give back, if we all keep fighting to put opportunity within the reach of everybody who is willing to work for it—America will be stronger, your future will be brighter. There is no limit to what we can do together.⁷

⁴ Sept. 20, 2016; Sept. 24, 2014; Sept. 23, 2009.

⁵ May 15, 2016; Jan. 28, 2014. *See* Theodore Parker for more on the arc of the moral universe.

⁶ Jan. 28, 2014; Jan. 21, 2013.

⁷ June 11, 2014.

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When you hear someone longing for the “good old days,” take it with a grain of salt. *Take it with a grain of salt.* We live in a great nation, and we are rightly proud of our history. We are beneficiaries of the labor and the grit and the courage of generations who came before. But I guess it’s part of human nature, especially in times of change and uncertainty, to want to look backwards and long for some imaginary past when everything worked and the economy hummed and all politicians were wise and every child was well mannered and America pretty much did whatever it wanted around the world.

Guess what? It ain’t so. [*Laughter*] The “good old days” weren’t all that good. Set aside life in the fifties, when women and people of color were systematically excluded from big chunks of American life. Yes, there have been some stretches in our history where the economy grew much faster or when government ran more smoothly. There were moments when, immediately after World War II, for example, or at the end of the Cold War, when the world bent more easily to our will. But those are sporadic, those moments, those episodes. In fact, by almost every measure, America is better—and the world is better—than it was 50 years ago or 30 years ago or even 8 years ago.⁸

We say America’s exceptional: not that our Nation has been flawless from the start, but that we have shown the capacity to change and make life better for those who follow. Yes, our progress has been uneven. The work of democracy has always been hard. It’s always been contentious. Sometimes it’s been bloody. For every two steps forward, it often feels we take one step back. But the long sweep of America has been defined by forward motion, a constant widening of our founding creed to embrace all and not just some.

What gives me the most hope is the people that I’ve seen. The American troops who have risked their lives and sacrificed their limbs for strangers half a world away; the students in Jakarta or Seoul who are eager to use their knowledge to benefit mankind; the faces in the square in Prague or a Parliament in Ghana who see democracy giving voice to their aspirations; the young people in the *favelas* of Rio and the schools of Mumbai whose eyes shine with promise. These men, women, and children of every race and every faith remind me that for every angry mob that gets shown on television, there are billions around the world who share similar hopes and dreams. They tell us that *there is a common heartbeat to humanity.*⁹

The currents of history may ebb and flow, but over time they move, decidedly, decisively, in a single direction. History is on the side of freedom: free societies, free governments, free economies, free people. And the future belongs to those who stand firm for those ideals.
– Barack Obama, Nov. 17, 2011; May 23, 2012

⁸ May 15, 2016.

⁹ Jan. 10, 2017; Sept. 25, 2012.

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Freedom and Security

*The values and ideals in our Constitution, Declaration of Independence, and Bill of Rights are the bedrock of our liberty and our security. We must remember this enduring truth. We uphold our fundamental principles and values not just because we choose to, but because they help keep us safe and keep us true to who we are. When America strays from our values, it not only undermines the rule of law, it alienates us from our allies, it energizes our adversaries, and it endangers our national security and the lives of our troops. So as Americans, we reject the false choice between our security and our ideals. We can and we must and we will protect both.*¹⁰

For the United States, defending rights is a matter of moral and pragmatic necessity. We stand up for universal values because it's the right thing to do. But America's support for democracy and human rights goes beyond idealism; it is a matter of national security. We know from experience that those who defend those values for their people have been our closest friends and allies, while those who have denied those rights, whether terrorist groups or tyrannical governments, have chosen to be our adversaries. Respect for human rights is an antidote to instability and the grievances that fuel violence and terror.¹¹

Belief in the rights of citizens was the beacon that guided us through our fight against fascism and communism.
– Barack Obama, May 25, 2011

Speaking up for those who cannot do so for themselves is not interfering in the affairs of other countries. It's not violating the rights of sovereign nations. It is staying true to our democratic principles. It is giving meaning to the human rights that we say are universal. And it sustains the progress that has helped turn dictatorships into democracies and ultimately increased our security in the world.¹²

The service and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform has promoted peace and prosperity from Germany to Korea and enabled democracy to take hold in places like the Balkans. We have borne this burden not because we seek to impose our will. We have done so out of enlightened self-interest, because we seek a better future for our children and grandchildren, and we believe that their lives will be better if others' children and grandchildren can live in freedom and prosperity. – Barack Obama, Dec. 10, 2009

¹⁰ May 22, 2009.

¹¹ Sept. 23, 2010; May 28, 2014.

¹² Nov. 8, 2010.

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Freedom—Preserving and Passing On

Each time we gather to inaugurate a President, we bear witness to the enduring strength of our Constitution. We affirm the promise of our democracy. We recall that what binds this Nation together is not the colors of our skin or the tenets of our faith or the origins of our names. What makes us exceptional—what makes us American—is our allegiance to an idea articulated in a declaration made more than two centuries ago: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Today we continue a never-ending journey to bridge the meaning of those words with the realities of our time. For history tells us that while these truths may be self-evident, they’ve never been self-executing; that *while freedom is a gift from God, it must be secured by His people here on Earth*. The patriots of 1776 did not fight to replace the tyranny of a king with the privileges of a few or the rule of a mob. They gave to us a republic, a government of and by and for the people, entrusting each generation to keep safe our founding creed. And for more than 200 years, we have.

This democracy we have is a precious thing. – Barack Obama, May 1, 2010

We are heirs to a proud legacy of freedom. With confidence in our cause, with faith in our fellow citizens, and with hope in our hearts, let us go about the work of extending the promise of America for this generation and the next.¹³

The oath I have sworn before you today, like the one recited by others who serve in this Capitol, was an oath to God and country, not party or faction. And we must faithfully execute that pledge during the duration of our service. But the words I spoke today are not so different from the oath that is taken each time a soldier signs up for duty or an immigrant realizes her dream. My oath is not so different from the pledge we all make to the flag that waves above and that fills our hearts with pride. They are the words of citizens and they represent our greatest hope.

You and I, as citizens, have the power to set this country’s course. You and I, as citizens, have the obligation to shape the debates of our time, not only with the votes we cast, but with the voices we lift in defense of *our most ancient values and enduring ideals*.

Let us, each of us, now embrace with solemn duty and awesome joy what is our lasting birthright. With common effort and common purpose, with passion and dedication, *let us answer the call of history and carry into an uncertain future that precious light of freedom*.¹⁴

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¹³ Jan. 21, 2013; Sept. 24, 2014; June 22, 2011.

¹⁴ Jan. 21, 2013.

America and Opportunity

Opportunity and Education

Education is the foundation for opportunity in our world. Maintaining our leadership in research and technology is crucial to America's success. But if we want to win the future, if we want innovation to produce jobs in America and not overseas, then we also have to win the race to educate our kids. Over the next ten years, nearly half of all new jobs will require education that goes beyond a high school education. Yet as many as a quarter of our students aren't even finishing high school. The quality of our math and science education lags behind many other nations. America has fallen to ninth in the proportion of young people with a college degree.

Every young person, every child—regardless of what they look like, where they come from, how much money their parents have—every child deserves a quality education. – Barack Obama, June 7, 2010

And so the question is whether all of us, as citizens and as parents, are willing to do what's necessary to give every child a chance to succeed. That responsibility begins not in our classrooms, but in our homes and communities. It's family that first instills the love of learning in a child. Only parents can make sure the TV is turned off and homework gets done.

There is no stronger weapon against inequality and no better path to opportunity than an education that can unlock a child's God-given potential. – Barack Obama, July 16, 2009

Education policies will open the doors of opportunity for our children, but it is up to us to ensure they walk through them. In the end, there is no program or policy that can substitute for a parent, for a mother or father who will attend those parent-teacher conferences or help with homework or turn off the TV, put away the video games, read to their child. I speak to you not just as a President, but as a father, when

We as parents can't tell our kids to do well in school and then fail to support them when they get home. You can't just contract out parenting. For our kids to excel, we have to accept our responsibility to help them learn.

Students also need to accept more responsibility for their own education. You've got to be an active participant in wanting to get an education. – Barack Obama, July 16, 2009; Nov. 4, 2009

I say that responsibility for our children's education must begin at home. That is not a Democratic issue or a Republican issue; that's an American issue.¹⁵

¹⁵ Sept. 20, 2016; Jan. 25, 2011; Feb. 24, 2009.

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We've got to say to our children, yes, if you're African American, the odds of growing up amid crime and gangs are higher. Yes, if you live in a poor neighborhood, you will face challenges that somebody in a wealthy suburb does not have to face. But that's not a reason to get bad grades, that's not a reason to cut class, that's not a reason to give up on your education and drop out of school. *No one has written your destiny for you. Your destiny is in your hands*, you cannot forget that. That's what we have to teach all of our children. No excuses—no excuses. You get that education, all those hardships will just make you stronger, better able to compete. Yes we can.¹⁶

Yes, government must be a force for opportunity. Yes, government must be a force for equality. But ultimately, we have to seize our own future, each and every day.
– Barack Obama, July 16, 2009

After parents, the biggest impact on a child's success comes from the man or woman at the front of the classroom. Every person in Congress can point to a teacher who changed the trajectory of their lives. Most teachers work tirelessly, with modest pay, sometimes digging into their own pocket for school supplies, just to make a difference. *Teachers matter.*¹⁷

A teacher comes in early, maybe with some extra supplies that she bought because she knows that a young girl might someday cure a disease.
– Barack Obama, Jan. 12, 2016

Study after study shows that the sooner a child begins learning, the better he or she does down the road. Every dollar we invest in high-quality early childhood education can save more than \$7 later on: by boosting graduation rates, reducing teen pregnancy, even reducing violent crime. In States that make it a priority to educate our youngest children, studies show students grow up more likely to read and do math at grade level, graduate high school, hold a job, form more stable families of their own. We know this works. So let's do what works and make sure none of our children start the race of life already behind. Let's give our kids that chance.¹⁸

The recognition that an education can fortify us to rise above any barrier, to meet any test, is reflected again and again throughout our history. In the midst of civil war, we set aside land grants for schools to teach farmers and factory workers the skills of an industrializing nation. At the close of World War II, we made it possible for returning GIs to attend college, building and broadening our great middle class. At the Cold War's dawn, we set up area studies centers on our

¹⁶ July 16, 2009.

¹⁷ Jan. 25, 2011; Jan. 24, 2012.

¹⁸ Feb. 12, 2013.

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campuses to prepare graduates to understand and address the global threats of a nuclear age. So education is what has always allowed us to meet the challenges of a changing world.

Education can also fortify our Nation as a whole. More and more, America's economic preeminence, our ability to outcompete other countries, will be shaped not just in our boardrooms, not just on our factory floors, but in our classrooms and our schools, and at universities. It will be determined by how well all of us, and especially our parents, educate our sons and daughters.

What's at stake is more than our ability to outcompete other nations, it's our ability to make democracy work in our own Nation. You know, years after he left office, decades after he penned the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson sat down in Monticello, and wrote a letter to a longtime legislator, urging him to do more on education. And Jefferson gave one principal reason, the one, perhaps, he found most compelling. "*If a nation expects to be ignorant and free,*" he wrote, "*it expects what never was and never will be.*" What Jefferson recognized, like the rest of that gifted founding generation, was that in the long run, their improbable experiment

called *America wouldn't work if its citizens were uninformed, if its citizens were apathetic, if its citizens checked out and left democracy to those who didn't have the best interests of all the people at heart.* It could only work if each of us stayed

In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity, it is a prerequisite. Knowledge is the currency of the 21st century. – Barack Obama, Feb. 24, 2009; Nov. 8, 2010

informed and engaged, if we held our government accountable, if we fulfilled the obligations of citizenship. The success of their experiment, they understood, depended on the participation of its people, the participation of Americans like all of you, the participation of all those who have ever sought to perfect our Union.¹⁹

In a fast-paced, hyperconnected, constantly changing world, there are few institutions that are more important to America's economic future than community colleges. In just two years, community colleges can change lives, change careers, grow our economy. They can change our country. All of us are better off when our businesses have access to the best-trained workers in the world. All of us are better off when entrepreneurs can boost their hometown economies and make it more attractive for young people to stay. All of us are better off when a parent can make ends meet and provide for her kids. The time you spend in community college is not only an investment in yourself, but a true act of faith in your country as well.²⁰

¹⁹ May 9, 2010.

²⁰ May 8, 2015.

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Opportunity for Everyone

America is not a place where the chance of birth or circumstance should decide our destiny. We believe that no matter who you are or where you come from, every person can fulfill their God-given potential.²¹

It's fitting that your motto at Miami Dade College is "*Opportunity changes everything.*" As someone who's only here because of the chances my education gave me, I couldn't agree more. Opportunity changes everything. America will only be as strong in this new century as the opportunities that we provide all our young people—Latino, Black, White, Asian, Native American, everybody. America will only be as strong as our pursuit of scientific research and our leadership in technology and innovation.²²

One quality that I believe makes the United States and the United Kingdom indispensable to this moment in history is how we define ourselves as nations. Unlike most countries in the world, we do not define citizenship based on race or ethnicity. Being American or British is not about belonging to a certain group, it's about believing in a certain set of ideals: the rights of individuals, the rule of law. That is why we hold incredible diversity within our borders. That's why there are people around the world right now who believe that if they come to America, if they come to New York, if they come to London, if they work hard, they can pledge allegiance to our flag and call themselves Americans; if they come to England, they can make a new life for themselves and can sing "God Save the Queen" just like any other citizen.

Every person deserves the same chance to live in security and dignity, to get an education, to find work, to give their children a better future.
– Barack Obama, Nov. 8, 2010

Yes, our diversity can lead to tension. And throughout our history there have been heated debates about immigration and assimilation in both of our countries. But even as these debates can be difficult, we fundamentally recognize that our patchwork heritage is an enormous strength; that in a world which will only grow smaller and more interconnected, the example of our two nations says it is possible for people to be united by their ideals, instead of divided by their differences.²³

Recognize ourselves in each other. – Barack Obama, Sept. 21, 2011

We've got to stand up against the slander and the hate leveled against those who look or worship differently. That's our obligation. We need to reject any politics—any politics—that targets people because of race or religion. Let me just

²¹ Feb. 12, 2013; Nov. 8, 2010.

²² April 29, 2011.

²³ May 25, 2011.

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say this. This is not a matter of political correctness, this is a matter of understanding *just what it is that makes us strong*. The world respects us not just for our arsenal, it respects us for our diversity and our openness and the way we respect every faith. When politicians insult Muslims, whether abroad or our fellow citizens, when a mosque is vandalized or a kid is called names, that doesn't make us safer. That's not telling it like it is. It's just wrong. It diminishes us in the eyes of the world. It makes it harder to achieve our goals. It betrays who we are as a country.

“We the People.” Our Constitution begins with those three simple words, words we've come to recognize mean *all the people, not just some; words that insist we rise and fall together, that that's how we might perfect our Union*.²⁴

Where women are full participants in a country's politics or economy, societies are more likely to succeed. Until a girl can imagine herself, can picture herself as a computer programmer or a combatant commander, she won't become one. Until there are women who tell her, ignore our pop culture obsession over beauty and fashion and focus instead on studying and inventing and competing and leading, she'll think those are the only things that girls are supposed to care about. When girls can go to school and get a job and pursue unlimited opportunity, that's when a country realizes its full potential. Our work won't be finished until all women in our country are truly equal: paid equally, treated equally, given the same opportunities as men, when our girls have the same opportunities as our boys. *No country can realize its potential if half its population cannot reach theirs*.²⁵

I can best look after my own daughters by making sure that my actions seek what is right for all people and all children and your daughters and your sons.
– Barack Obama, Sept. 20, 2016

If we're going to be serious about race going forward, we need to uphold laws against discrimination: in hiring and in housing and in education and in the criminal justice system. That is what our Constitution and our highest ideals require. But laws alone won't be enough. Hearts must change. They won't change overnight. Social attitudes oftentimes take generations to change. But if our democracy is to work the way it should in this increasingly diverse Nation, then each one of us needs to try to heed the advice of a great character in American fiction, Atticus Finch, who said, “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”

For Blacks and other minority groups, that means tying our own very real struggles for justice to the challenges that a lot of people in this country face, not

²⁴ June 29, 2016; Jan. 12, 2016.

²⁵ Sept. 24, 2014; May 14, 2012; Sept. 28, 2015; June 29, 2016; Sept. 21, 2011.

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only the refugee or the immigrant or the rural poor or the transgender American, but also the middle-aged White guy who, from the outside, may seem like he's got advantages, but has seen his world upended by economic and cultural and technological change.²⁶

Recognize the burdens you carry with you [young Black students]—the gnawing doubts born of the Jim Crow culture that told you every day that somehow you were inferior, the temptation to shrink from the world, to accept your place, to avoid risks, to be afraid. That temptation was necessarily strong, but resist the temptation to use them as excuses. Be confident in your heritage. Be confident in your Blackness. As Principal Alisha Kiner said, “*You can't let the past get you down. You have to let it motivate you.*”²⁷

We've got no time for excuses. Not because the bitter legacy of slavery and segregation have vanished entirely; they have not. Not because racism and discrimination no longer exist; we know those are still out there. You at Morehouse College have to remember that whatever you've gone through pales in comparison to the hardships previous generations endured, and they overcame them. And if they overcame them, you can overcome them too.

You now hail from a lineage and legacy of immeasurably strong men, men who bore tremendous burdens and still laid the stones for the path on which we now walk. You wear the mantle of Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington and Ralph Bunche and Langston Hughes and George Washington Carver and Ralph

Because of what activists and other leaders did, we are a more perfect Union. To every American who lived and breathed the hard work of change: you did change the world. You did. – Barack Obama, July 16, 2009; Jan. 10, 2017

Abernathy and Thurgood Marshall and, yes, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. These men were many things to many people. And they knew full well the role that racism played in their lives. But when it came to their own accomplishments and sense of purpose, they had no time for excuses.

Inspire those who look up to you to expect more of themselves. We know that too many young men in our community continue to make bad choices. And I have to say, growing up, I made quite a few myself. Sometimes, I wrote off my own failings as just another example of the world trying to keep a Black man down. I had a tendency sometimes to make excuses for me not doing the right thing. But one of the things that all of you have learned over the last four years is, there's no longer any room for excuses.²⁸

We believe that the future is what we make it. – Barack Obama, Nov. 8, 2010

²⁶ Jan. 10, 2017.

²⁷ May 19, 2013; May 7, 2016; May 16, 2011.

²⁸ May 19, 2013.

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One tie that binds us as African Americans is our particular awareness of injustice and unfairness and struggle. We have cousins and uncles and brothers and sisters who we remember were just as smart and just as talented as we were, but somehow got ground down by structures that are unfair and unjust. And that means we have to not only question the world as it is, but also stand up for those African Americans who haven't been so lucky. Because, yes, you've worked hard, but you've also been lucky. That's a pet peeve of mine: People who have been successful and don't realize they've been lucky. That God may have blessed them; it wasn't anything you did. So don't have an attitude. But we must also expand our moral imaginations to understand and empathize with all people who are struggling, not just Black folks who are struggling.²⁹

Many of you know what it's like to be an outsider, know what it's like to be marginalized, know what it's like to feel the sting of discrimination. And that's an experience that a lot of Americans share. So your experiences with discrimination give you special insight that today's leaders need. If you tap into that experience, it should endow you with empathy: the understanding of what it's like to walk in somebody else's shoes, to see through their eyes; to know what it's like when you're not born on third base, thinking you hit a triple. It should give you the ability to connect. It should give you a sense of compassion and what it means to overcome barriers.

And I will tell you, *whatever success I have achieved, whatever positions of leadership I have held, depended less on Ivy League degrees or SAT scores or GPAs and have instead been due to that sense of connection and empathy, the special obligation I felt, as a Black man like you, to help those who need it most: people who didn't have the opportunities that I had. Because there but for the grace of God, go I; I might have been in their shoes. I might have been in prison. I might have been unemployed. I might not have been able to support a family. And that motivates me.*

So it's up to you to widen your circle of concern, to care about justice for everybody: White, Black, and Brown. Everybody. Not just in your own community, but also across this country and around the world. *To make sure everyone has a voice and everybody gets a seat at the table; that everybody, everybody gets a chance to walk through those doors of opportunity.*³⁰

No matter who you are, no matter what you look like, everyone deserves a fair chance, everyone deserves a fair go. – Barack Obama, Nov. 17, 2011

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²⁹ May 7, 2016.

³⁰ May 19, 2013.

The American People

The American People—Together

As Americans, we are blessed with God-given talents and inalienable rights, but with those rights come responsibilities: to ourselves and to one another and to future generations. This country only works when we accept certain obligations to one another and to future generations; that our rights are wrapped up in the rights of others; and that well into our third century as a nation, it remains the task of us all, as citizens of these United States, to be the authors of the next great chapter of our American story.³¹

Along with collective responsibilities, we have individual responsibilities. Yet no matter how responsibly we live our lives, any one of us at any time may face a job loss or a sudden illness or a home swept away in a terrible storm. Together, we resolved that a great nation must care for the vulnerable and protect its people from life's worst hazards and misfortune. We remember when twilight years were spent in poverty and parents of a child with a disability had nowhere to turn.

At the very first town meeting [after a devastating tornado], every citizen of Joplin was handed a Post-it Note and asked to write down their goals and their hopes for Joplin's future. And more than a thousand notes covered an entire wall and became the blueprint that architects are following to this day. – Barack Obama, May 21, 2012

The commitments we make to each other through Medicare and Medicaid and Social Security do not sap our initiative, they strengthen us. They do not make us a nation of takers; they free us to take the risks that make this country great. We, the people, still believe that our obligations as Americans are not just to ourselves, but to all posterity. And so part of our common tradition has expressed itself in a conviction that every citizen deserves a basic measure of security: healthcare if you get sick, unemployment insurance if you lose your job, a dignified retirement after a lifetime of hard work.³²

On September 11, 2001, in our time of grief, the American people came together. We offered our neighbors a hand, and we offered the wounded our blood. We reaffirmed our ties to each other and our love of community and country. On that day, no matter where we came from, what God we prayed to, or what race or ethnicity we were, we were united as one American family. – Barack Obama, May 1, 2011

³¹ May 5, 2013; Feb. 12, 2013.

³² May 19, 2013; Jan. 21, 2013; May 25, 2011.

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Our Nation draws strength from our differences. Diversity should be a source of strength, not a cause for division. *Ideals matter more than the color of our skin or the circumstances of our birth.*

Our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus and nonbelievers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this

Our identities do not have to be defined by putting someone else down, but can be enhanced by lifting somebody else up; they don't have to be defined in opposition to others, but rather by a belief in liberty and equality and justice and fairness. All of us have contributions to make.
– Barack Obama, Sept. 20, 2016; June 11, 2014

Earth. We welcome the talents and skills of all people, no matter where you come from, no matter what you look like. With every generation, we renew our country with the drive and dynamism that says, here in America, anything is possible.³³

As much as government can do and must do, it is ultimately the faith and determination of the American people upon which this Nation relies. It is the kindness to take in a stranger when the levees break, the selflessness of workers who would rather cut their hours than see a friend lose their job, which sees us through our darkest hours. It is the firefighter's courage to storm a stairway filled with smoke, but also a parent's willingness to nurture a child, that finally decides our fate.

A reservoir of goodness in people. – Barack Obama, Jan. 10, 2017

Our challenges may be new. The instruments with which we meet them may be new. But those values upon which our success depends—honesty and hard work, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism—these things are old. These things are true. They have been the quiet force of progress throughout our history.³⁴

The answers to our problems are in our laboratories and our universities, in our fields and our factories, in the imaginations of our entrepreneurs and the pride of the hardest-working people on Earth. – Barack Obama, Feb. 24, 2009

Being American is not about what we look like or where our families came from. It is about our commitment to a common creed. I believe in you, the American people. – Barack Obama, June 29, 2016; Jan. 12, 2016

³³ June 22, 2011; July 11, 2009; Dec. 17, 2014; Jan. 20, 2009; May 18, 2011.

³⁴ Jan. 20, 2009.

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Just over a decade ago, I gave a speech in Boston where I said there wasn't a liberal America or a conservative America, a Black America or a White America, but a United States of America. I said this because I had seen it in my own life, in a nation that gave someone like me a chance; because I grew up in Hawaii, a melting pot of races and customs; because I made Illinois my home, a State of small towns, rich farmland, one of the world's great cities, a microcosm of the country where Democrats and Republicans and Independents, good people of every ethnicity and every faith, share certain bedrock values. I still believe that we are one people. I still believe that together, we can do great things, even when the odds are long. I believe this because over and over in my six years in office, I have seen America at its best. *When we act together, there's nothing the United States of America can't achieve.*³⁵

Acts of sacrifice and decency create ripple effects, ones that lift up families and communities; that spread opportunity and boost our economy; that reach folks in the forgotten corners of the world who, in committed young people like you, see the true face of America: our strength, our goodness, our diversity, our enduring power, our ideals. – Barack Obama, May 13, 2009

One of my proudest possessions is the flag that the SEAL team took with them on the mission to get bin Laden. On it are each of their names. Some may be Democrats, some may be Republicans, but that doesn't matter. All that mattered that day was the mission. No one thought about politics. No one thought about themselves. One of the young men involved in the raid later told me that he didn't deserve credit for the mission. It only succeeded, he said, because every single member of that unit did their job: the pilot who landed the helicopter that spun out of control, the translator who kept others from entering the compound, the troops who separated the women and children from the fight, the SEALs who charged up the stairs. More than that, the mission only succeeded because every member of that unit trusted each other. Because you can't charge up those stairs into darkness and danger unless you know that there's somebody behind you, watching your back. So it is with America. Each time I look at that flag, I'm reminded that our destiny is stitched together like those 50 stars and those 13 stripes.³⁶

We are stronger when America fields a full team. When we harness the talents of every man and every woman from every race and every religion and every creed, no nation can ever match us. – Barack Obama, Jan. 28, 2014; May 24, 2013

³⁵ Jan. 20, 2015; Jan. 24, 2012.

³⁶ Jan. 24, 2012.

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The American Spirit

Being American is not about what we look like or where our families came from. It is about our commitment to a common creed. Our patriotism is not rooted in ethnicity, but in a shared belief in the enduring and permanent promise of this country. Our celebration of initiative and enterprise, our insistence on hard work and personal responsibility, these are constants in our character. There is something in the American character that will always triumph.

I see an American century because of the character of our country, the spirit that has always made us exceptional. That simple yet revolutionary idea, there at our founding and in our hearts ever since, is that we have it in our power to make the world anew, to make the future what we will. It is that fundamental faith, that American optimism, which says no challenge is too great, no mission is too hard. That is the essence of America, and there's nothing else like it anywhere in the world. It's what has inspired the oppressed in every corner of the world to demand the same freedoms for themselves. It's what has inspired generations to come to our shores, renewing us with their energy and their hopes.³⁷

Summon what is best in us. We must draw on the strength of our values, for the challenges that we face may have changed, but the things that we believe in must not. – Barack Obama, Jan. 28, 2014; Dec. 1, 2009

An essential spirit of innovation and practical problem-solving guided our Founders. That spirit, born of the Enlightenment, made us an economic powerhouse: the spirit that took flight at Kitty Hawk and Cape Canaveral, the spirit that cures disease and put a computer in every pocket. It's that spirit, a faith in reason and enterprise and *the primacy of right over might*, that allowed us to resist the lure of fascism and tyranny during the Great Depression; that allowed us to build a post-World War II order with other democracies, an order based not just on military power or national affiliations, but built on principles: the rule of law, human rights, freedom of religion and speech and assembly, and an independent press.³⁸

Some of you have seen what happened in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, as a consequence of the tornadoes that struck. The mayor and I visited a community where the devastation from this storm was simply heartbreaking—entire homes and blocks just gone, wiped away. Some families lost everything. Some families lost family. But what was striking is the way that damaged community has come together, how they've rallied around one another. The mayor there, a young man doing wonderful work, Mayor Walter Maddox, put it best. He told me that when disasters like this strike, all our grievances seem to go away. All our differences

³⁷ June 29, 2016; April 29, 2011; Jan. 21, 2013; May 28, 2014; May 23, 2012.

³⁸ Jan. 10, 2017.

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don't seem to matter. All our political disagreements seem so petty. We help each other, we support one another, as one country, as one people. That's the American spirit.³⁹

When a gunman opened fire on a Sikh temple in Wisconsin and a police officer named Brian Murphy was the first to arrive, he did not consider his own safety. He fought back until help arrived and ordered his fellow officers to protect the safety of the Americans worshiping inside, even as he lay bleeding from 12 bullet wounds. And when asked how he did that, Brian said, "That's just the way we're made."⁴⁰

Brandon Fisher started a company in Berlin, Pennsylvania, that specializes in a new kind of drilling technology. And one day last summer, he saw the news that halfway across the world, 33 men were trapped in a Chilean mine, and no one knew how to save them. But Brandon thought his company could help. And so he designed a rescue that would come to be known as Plan B. His employees worked around the clock to manufacture the necessary drilling equipment, and Brandon left for Chile. Along with others, he began drilling a 2,000-foot hole into the ground, working three or four days at a time without any sleep. Thirty-seven days later, Plan B succeeded and the miners were rescued. But because he didn't want all of the attention, Brandon wasn't there when the miners emerged. He'd already gone back home, back to work on his next project. And later, one of his employees said of the rescue, "We proved that Center Rock is a little company, but we do big things." *We do big things.* From the earliest days of our founding, America has been the story of ordinary people who dare to dream. That's how we win the future.

We're a nation that says, "I might not have a lot of money, but I have this great idea for a new company." "I might not come from a family of college graduates, but I will be the first to get my degree." "I might not know those people in trouble, but I think I can help them, and I need to try." "I'm not sure how we'll reach that better place beyond the horizon, but I know we'll get there. I know we will."

We do big things. *The idea of America endures.* Our destiny remains our choice. And tonight, more than two centuries later, it's because of our people that our future is hopeful, our journey goes forward, and the state of our Union is strong.⁴¹

The ideals that have guided our Nation and led the world: a belief that all people are treated equal and deserve the freedom to determine their destiny. That is the light that guides us still. – Barack Obama, May 2, 2012

³⁹ April 29, 2011.

⁴⁰ Feb. 12, 2013.

⁴¹ Jan. 25, 2011.

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The American People—Overcoming Adversity

We are passing through a time of great trial [the Great Recession]. When tough times inevitably come, when war and economic hardship threaten to blow us off course, we do what Americans have always done. We remember our moral compass, that we are citizens with obligations to each other, that we all have responsibilities, that we're all in this together, that we rise and fall as one, that we are the United States of America. And so we pull together. Take comfort in knowing that as a country, we've navigated tougher times before.

If we hold fast to what keeps us strong and unique among nations, then I am confident that future historians will look back on this moment and say that we faced the test of our time. We stood our watch, we did our duty, we continued our American journey, and we passed our country, safer and stronger, to the next generation.⁴²

We have the power to grow from difficult experiences. It's moments like these that force us to try harder and dig deeper and to discover gifts we never knew we had, to find the greatness that lies within each of us. – Barack Obama, May 21, 2012; May 13, 2009

In the year of America's birth, in the coldest of months, a small band of patriots huddled by dying campfires on the shores of an icy river. The Capital was abandoned. The enemy was advancing. The snow was stained with blood. At a moment when the outcome of our Revolution was most in doubt, the Father of our Nation ordered these words be read to the people: "Let it be told to the future world...that in the depth of winter, when nothing but hope and virtue could survive...that the city and the country, alarmed at one common danger, came forth to meet [it]." America, in the face of our common dangers, in this winter of our hardship, let us remember these timeless words. With hope and virtue, let us brave once more the icy currents and endure what storms may come. Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested, we refused to let this journey end; that we did not turn back, nor did we falter. And with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations.⁴³

[Just before the Great Recession], Rebekah and Ben Erler of Minneapolis were newlyweds. She waited tables. He worked construction. Their first child Jack was on the way. They were young and in love in America. And it doesn't get much better than that. "If only we had known," Rebekah wrote to me last spring, "what was about to happen to the housing and construction market." As the crisis worsened, Ben's business dried up, so he took what jobs he could find, even if

⁴² Dec. 1, 2009; May 18, 2011; April 29, 2011.

⁴³ Jan. 20, 2009.

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they kept him on the road for long stretches of time. Rebekah took out student loans and enrolled in community college and retrained for a new career. They sacrificed for each other. And slowly, it paid off. They bought their first home. They had a second son Henry. Rebekah got a better job and then a raise. Ben was back in construction and home for dinner every night.

“It is amazing,” Rebekah wrote, “what you can bounce back from when you have to.... We are a strong, tight-knit family who has made it through some very, very hard times.” *We are a strong, tight-knit family who has made it through some very, very hard times.*

America, Rebekah and Ben’s story is our story. They represent the millions who have worked hard and scrimped and sacrificed and retooled. *You are the reason that I ran for this office. You are the people I was thinking of six years ago today, in the darkest months of the crisis, when I stood on the steps of this Capitol and promised we would rebuild our economy on a new foundation. And it has been your resilience, your effort that has made it possible for our country to emerge stronger.*

We believed we could reverse the tide of outsourcing and draw new jobs to our shores. And over the past 5 years, our businesses have created more than 11 million new jobs.

We believed we could reduce our dependence on foreign oil and protect our planet. And today, America is number one in oil and gas. America is number one in wind power. Every three weeks, we bring online as much solar power as we did in all of 2008. And thanks to lower gas prices and higher fuel standards, the typical family this year should save about \$750 at the pump.

We believed we could prepare our kids for a more competitive world. And today, our younger students have earned the highest math and reading scores on record. Our high school graduation rate has hit an all-time high. More Americans finish college than ever before.

We believed that sensible regulations could prevent another crisis, shield families from ruin, and encourage fair competition. Today, we have new tools to stop taxpayer-funded bailouts and a new consumer watchdog to protect us from predatory lending and abusive credit card practices. And in the past year alone, about 10 million uninsured Americans finally gained the security of health coverage.

At every step, we were told our goals were misguided or too ambitious, that we would crush jobs and explode deficits. Instead, we’ve seen the fastest economic growth in over a decade, our deficits cut by two-thirds, a stock market that has doubled, and healthcare inflation at its lowest rate in 50 years. This is good news, people. *[Laughter]*

So the verdict is clear. *Middle-class economics works.* Expanding opportunity works. And these policies will continue to work as long as politics don’t get in the way. We can’t slow down businesses or put our economy at risk with government shutdowns or fiscal showdowns. We can’t put the security of families at risk by

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taking away their health insurance or unraveling the new rules on Wall Street or refighting past battles on immigration when we've got to fix a broken system. And if a bill comes to my desk that tries to do any of these things, I will veto it. It will have earned my veto.

Today, thanks to a growing economy, the recovery is touching more and more lives. Wages are finally starting to rise again. We know that more small-business owners plan to raise their employees' pay than at any time since 2007. But here's the thing: Those of us here tonight, we need to set our sights higher than just making sure government doesn't screw things up—[laughter]—that government doesn't halt the progress we're making. We need to do more than just do no harm. Tonight, together, let's do more to restore the link between hard work and growing opportunity for every American.

Because families like Rebekah's still need our help. She and Ben are working as hard as ever, but they've had to forego vacations and a new car so that they can pay off student loans and save for retirement. Friday night pizza, that's a big splurge. Basic childcare for Jack and Henry costs more than their mortgage and almost as much as a year at the University of Minnesota. Like millions of hard-working Americans, Rebekah *isn't asking for a handout, but she is asking that we look for more ways to help families get ahead.*

And in fact, at every moment of economic change throughout our history, this country has taken bold action to adapt to new circumstances and to make sure everyone gets a fair shot. We set up worker protections, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid to protect ourselves from the harshest adversity. We gave our citizens schools and colleges, infrastructure and the Internet, tools they needed to go as far as their efforts and their dreams will take them.

When we act together, there's nothing the United States of America can't achieve.
— Barack Obama, Jan. 24, 2012

*That's what middle-class economics is: the idea that this country does best when everyone gets their fair shot, everyone does their fair share, everyone plays by the same set of rules. We don't just want everyone to share in America's success, we want everyone to contribute to our success.*⁴⁴

No matter how hard we are tested, we look to our faith and our faith in one another. No matter what the challenge, we've always carried the American Dream forward. That's been true throughout our history.

When bombs fell on Pearl Harbor, when an Iron Curtain fell over Europe, when the threat of nuclear war loomed, when a brilliant September morning was darkened by terror, in none of those instances did we falter. We endured. We carried the dream forward.

We've gone through periods of great economic turmoil, from an economy where most people worked on farms to one where most people worked in

⁴⁴ Jan. 20, 2015.

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factories, to now one fueled by information and technology. Through it all, we've persevered, we've adapted, we've prospered. Workers found their voice and the right to organize for fair wages and safe working conditions. We carried forward.

When waves of Irish and Italian immigrants were derided as criminals and outcasts, when Catholics were discriminated against or Jews had to succumb to quotas or Muslims were blamed for society's ills, when Blacks were treated as second-class citizens and marriages like my own parents' were illegal in much of the country, we didn't stop. We didn't accept inequality. We fought. We overcame. We carried the dream forward. We have carried this dream forward through times when our politics seemed broken.

"Overcoming adversity is a decision. You can let that beat you, or you can make the decision to move forward."
– Brad Snyder, quoted by Barack Obama, May 24, 2013

And we've made it through those moments. None of it was easy. A lot of it was messy. Sometimes there was violence. Sometimes it took years, even decades, for us to find our way through. But here's the thing: We made it through. We made it through because in each of those moments, we made a choice.

Rather than turn inward and wall off America from the rest of the world, we've chosen to stand up forcefully for the ideals and the rights we believe are universal for all men and women.

Rather than settle for an America where everybody is left to fend for themselves, where we think only about our own short-term needs instead of the country that we're leaving to our children, we have chosen to build a nation where everybody has a shot at opportunity, where everyone can succeed. We've chosen to invest in our people and in their future, building public schools, sending a generation to college on the GI Bill, laying highways and railroads, building ports all across the country.

Rather than turn on each other in times of cultural upheaval, we've chosen to march, to organize, to sit in, to turn out, to petition our government for women's rights and voting rights and civil rights, even in the face of fierce resistance, because we are Americans, and no matter who we are or what we look like, we believe that in this country, all are equal, all are free.

Rather than give in to the voices suggesting we set our sights lower, downsize our dreams, or settle for something less, we've chosen again and again to make America bigger, bolder, more diverse, more generous, more hopeful.

Because throughout our history, what has distinguished us from all other nations is not just our wealth, it's not just our power. It's been our deep commitment to individual freedom and personal responsibility, but also our unshakeable commitment to one another, a recognition that we share a future, that we rise or fall together, that we are part of a common enterprise that is greater, somehow, than the sum of its parts.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ April 29, 2011.

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The American People—Meeting Challenges

These are difficult years for our country. But *we are Americans. We are tougher than the times we live in.*

Think back to the sense of unity that prevailed on 9/11. Freedom is more powerful than fear, and we have always met challenges—whether war or depression, natural disasters or terrorist attacks—by coming together around our common ideals as one Nation and one people.

America can do whatever we set our mind to. That is the story of our history, whether it's the pursuit of prosperity for our people or the struggle for equality for all our citizens, our commitment to stand up for our values abroad, and our sacrifices to make the world a safer place. We can do these things not just because of our wealth or power, but because of who we are.⁴⁶

There is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character, than giving our all to a difficult task. – Barack Obama, Jan. 20, 2009

We live in a time of extraordinary change, change that's reshaping the way we live, the way we work, our planet, our place in the world. It's change that promises amazing medical breakthroughs, but also economic disruptions that strain working families. It promises education for girls in the most remote villages, but also connects terrorists plotting an ocean away. It's change that can broaden opportunity or widen inequality. And whether we like it or not, the pace of this change will only accelerate.

America has been through big changes before: wars and depression, the influx of new immigrants, workers fighting for a fair deal, movements to expand civil rights. Each time, there have been those who told us to fear the future; who claimed we could slam the brakes on change; who promised to restore past glory if we just got some group or idea that was threatening America under control. And each time, we overcame those fears. We did not, in the words of Lincoln, adhere to the “dogmas of the quiet past.” Instead, we thought anew and acted anew. We made change work for us, always extending America's promise outward, to the next frontier, to more people. And because we did, because we saw opportunity where others saw peril, we emerged stronger and better than before.

We're not meant to walk this road alone; we're not expected to face down adversity by ourselves. We need God. We need each other. We are important to each other, and we're stronger together than we are on our own. – Barack Obama, May 21, 2012

What was true then can be true now. Our unique strengths as a nation—our optimism and work ethic, our spirit of discovery, our diversity, our commitment

⁴⁶ Sept. 8, 2011; May 1, 2011; Dec. 6, 2015.

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to the rule of law—these things give us everything we need to ensure prosperity and security for generations to come. But such progress is not inevitable. It’s the result of choices we make together. And we face such choices right now. Will we respond to the changes of our time with fear, turning inward as a nation, turning against each other as a people? Or will we face the future with confidence in who we are, in what we stand for, in the incredible things that we can do together?⁴⁷

The story of Joplin [after a devastating tornado] isn’t just what happened that day. It’s the story of what happened the next day and the day after that and all the days and weeks and months that followed. As your city manager, Mark Rohr, said, the people here chose to define the tragedy “not by what happened to us, but by how we responded.”⁴⁸

*When Mohamad Abedi was a boy, the suffering he saw in refugee camps in Lebanon didn’t drive him into despair, it inspired him to become a doctor.
– Barack Obama, June 14, 2014*

We Americans are an optimistic people. We know that even the darkest storms pass. We know that a brighter day beckons, and that, yes, tomorrow can be a better day. For through two centuries of challenge and change, we have never lost sight of our guiding stars: the liberty, the justice, the opportunity that we seek for ourselves, and the universal freedoms and rights that we stand for around the world. We are committed to forging an America that is safer, a world that is more secure, and a future that represents not the deepest of fears but the highest of hopes. *We will go forward with the confidence that right makes might.*⁴⁹

We have a shared belief in the ultimate triumph of human freedom and human dignity, a conviction that we have a say in how this story ends. We are Americans, and our destiny is never written for us, it is written by us. – Barack Obama, May 25, 2011; May 22, 2010

*We are heirs to a proud legacy of freedom. With confidence in our cause, with faith in our fellow citizens, and with hope in our hearts, let us go about the work of extending the promise of America for this generation and the next. Let us, each of us, now embrace with solemn duty and awesome joy what is our lasting birthright. With common effort and common purpose, with passion and dedication, let us answer the call of history and carry into an uncertain future that precious light of freedom.
– Barack Obama, Sept. 24, 2014; June 22, 2011; Jan. 21, 2013*

⁴⁷ Jan. 12, 2016.

⁴⁸ May 21, 2012.

⁴⁹ May 18, 2011; Dec. 1, 2009.

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Community, Family, and Faith

Living our values makes us safer and it makes us stronger. In our hands lies the ability to shape our world for good or for ill. I know that it's easy to lose sight of this truth, to become cynical and doubtful, consumed with the petty and the trivial. But in my life, I have also learned that hope is found in unlikely places, that inspiration often comes not from those with the most power or celebrity, but from the dreams and aspirations of ordinary Americans who are anything but ordinary.

Stronger families. Stronger communities. A stronger America.
– Barack Obama, Feb. 12, 2013

I think of Leonard Abess, a bank president from Miami who reportedly cashed out of his company, took a \$60 million bonus, and gave it out to all 399 people who worked for him, plus another 72 who used to work for him. He didn't tell anyone, but when the local newspaper found out, he simply said, "I knew some of these people since I was seven years old. It didn't feel right getting the money myself."

I think about Greensburg, Kansas, a town that was completely destroyed by a tornado, but is being rebuilt by its residents as a global example of how clean energy can power an entire community, how it can bring jobs and businesses to a place where piles of bricks and rubble once lay. "The tragedy was terrible," said one of the men who helped them rebuild. "But the folks here know that it also provided an incredible opportunity."⁵⁰

Be the best father you can be to your children, because nothing is more important. What makes you a man isn't the ability to conceive a child, it's having the courage to raise one. I was raised by a heroic single mom, wonderful grandparents, who made incredible sacrifices for me. But I sure wish I had had a father who was not only present, but involved. Didn't know my dad. And so my whole life, I've tried to be for Michelle and my girls what my father was not for my mother and me. I want to break that cycle where a father is not at home, where a father is not helping to raise that son or daughter. I want to be a better father, a better husband, a better man.

When I am on my deathbed someday, I will not be thinking about any particular legislation I pass. I will not be thinking about a policy I promoted. I will not be thinking about the speech I gave. I will not be thinking about the Nobel Prize I received. I will be thinking about that walk I took with my daughters. I'll be thinking about a lazy afternoon with my wife. I'll be thinking about sitting around the dinner table and seeing them happy and healthy and knowing that they were loved. And I'll be thinking about whether I did right by all of them.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Feb. 24, 2009.

⁵¹ May 19, 2013; Feb. 12, 2013.

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Each year, at the beginning of shrimping season, the region's fishermen take part in a tradition that was brought to America long ago by fishing immigrants from Europe. It's called the Blessing of the Fleet, and today, it's a celebration where clergy from different religions gather to say a prayer for the safety and success of the men and women who will soon head out to sea, some for weeks at a time.

*In the end, in some way,
we are all fishermen.*
— Barack Obama, May 17,
2009

The ceremony goes on in good times and in bad. It took place after Katrina, and it took place a few weeks ago, at the beginning of the most difficult season these fishermen have ever faced. As a priest and former fisherman once said of the tradition: “The blessing is not that God has promised to remove all obstacles and dangers. The blessing is that He is with us always.”

This Nation has known hard times before, and we will surely know them again. What sees us through—what has always seen us through—is our strength, our resilience, and our unyielding faith that something better awaits us if we summon the courage to reach for it.

Tonight we pray for that courage. We pray for the people of the Gulf. And we pray that a Hand may guide us through the storm towards a brighter day. Thank you. God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.⁵²

I first came to Chicago when I was in my early twenties. And I was still trying to figure out who I was, still searching for a purpose in my life. And it was a neighborhood not far from here [McCormick Place East's Lakeside Center] where I began working with church groups in the shadows of closed steel mills. It was on these streets where I witnessed the power of faith and the quiet dignity of working people in the face of struggle and loss.⁵³

I was not raised in a particularly religious household, but my mother instilled in me a sense of service and empathy that eventually led me to become a community organizer after I graduated from college. And a group of Catholic churches in Chicago helped fund an organization known as the Developing Communities Project, and we worked to lift up south side neighborhoods that had been devastated when the local steel plant closed.

And it was quite an eclectic crew—Catholic and Protestant churches, Jewish and African American organizers, working-class black, white, and Hispanic residents—all of us with different experiences, all of us with different beliefs. But all of us learned to work side by side, because all of us saw in these neighborhoods other human beings who needed our help to find jobs and improve schools. We were bound together in the service of others.

And something else happened during the time I spent in these neighborhoods, perhaps because the church folks I worked with were so welcoming and

⁵² June 15, 2010.

⁵³ Jan. 10, 2017.

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understanding; perhaps because they invited me to their services and sang with me from their hymnals; perhaps because I was really broke and they fed me. [Laughter] Perhaps because I witnessed all of the good works their faith inspired them to perform, I found myself drawn not just *to* the work with the church, I was drawn to be *in* the church. It was through this service that I was brought to Christ.

At the time, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin was the Archbishop of Chicago, congenial and gentle in his persuasion, always trying to bring people together, always trying to find common ground. And just before he died, a reporter asked Cardinal Bernardin about this approach to his ministry. And he said,

Soul force can transform America. All of us can be coworkers with God.

– Barack Obama, May 19, 2013; Sept. 20, 2016

“You can’t really get on with preaching the Gospel until you’ve touched hearts and minds.” My heart and mind were touched by him. They were touched by the words and deeds of the men and women I worked alongside in parishes across Chicago. And I’d like to think that we touched the hearts and minds of the

Dr. Martin Luther King believed that the voices of “unarmed truth and unconditional love” would have the final word. And they’re out there, those voices. That’s what makes me so hopeful about our future. – Barack Obama, Jan. 12, 2016

neighborhood families whose lives we helped change. For this, I believe, is our highest calling.⁵⁴

It’s beyond our capacity as human beings to know with certainty what God has planned for us or what He asks of us. And those of us who believe must trust that His wisdom is greater than our own. And this doubt should not push away our faith. But it should humble us. It should temper our passions, cause us to be wary of too much self-righteousness. It should compel us to remain

We cannot know, each of us, how many days we will walk this Earth. – Barack Obama, May 20, 2015

open and curious and eager to continue the spiritual and moral debate. And within our vast democracy, this doubt should remind us even as we cling to our faith to persuade through reason, through an appeal whenever we can to universal rather than parochial principles, and most of all, through an abiding example of good works and charity and kindness and service that moves hearts and minds.⁵⁵

The one rule that lies at the heart of every major religion is that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Adhering to this law of love has always been the core struggle of human nature. – Barack Obama, Dec. 10, 2009

⁵⁴ May 17, 2009.

⁵⁵ May 17, 2009.

II. Democracy and Individual Rights

Individual Rights

Certain rights are universal, among them, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, and the freedom of citizens to choose their own leaders. These are not American rights or Western rights. These are *human rights*—*the birthright of every person. They stir in every soul.*⁵⁶

So much attention in our world turns to what divides us. That's what we see on the news. That's what consumes our political debates. But when you strip all away, people everywhere long for the freedom to determine their destiny, the dignity that comes with work, the comfort that comes with faith, and *the justice that exists when governments serve their people and not the other way around.* The United States of America will always stand up for these aspirations, for our own people and for people all across the world. That was our founding purpose. That is what our history shows. We have a shared belief in the ultimate triumph of human freedom and human dignity.⁵⁷

Democracy is going to take different forms in different parts of the world. Each country gives life to democratic principles in its own way, as every democracy reflects the uniqueness of a nation. The very idea of a people governing themselves depends upon government giving expression to their unique culture, their unique history, their unique experiences.⁵⁸

The Nobel Prize has extraordinary power to magnify the cause of justice when it's confronting great resistance. In 1964, when Dr. Martin Luther King received this prize, the course of the civil rights movement was still uncertain. How that would play itself out was not yet entirely known. And for a Baptist preacher from the South to be lifted up on the international stage highlighted the fact that this was not simply a parochial struggle but was rather a struggle for the ages, a struggle for the hearts and minds not just of the American people but of the world.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Nov. 17, 2011; Sept. 24, 2013.

⁵⁷ Sept. 25, 2012; May 25, 2011.

⁵⁸ Sept. 28, 2015; Sept. 23, 2010.

⁵⁹ Dec. 10, 2009 (Nobel Banquet Remarks).

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What sets America apart is not solely our power, it is the principles upon which our Union was founded. That is why we have a stake in the democratic aspirations for all those yearning for freedom around the world. I have seen a longing for positive change—for peace and for freedom and for opportunity and for the end to bigotry—in the eyes of young people who I’ve met around the globe. We will support [democratic aspirations] with fidelity to our ideals, with the power of our example, and with an unwavering belief that all human beings deserve to live with freedom and dignity. *We protect our own freedom and prosperity by extending it to others.* Together with our friends and allies, America will always seek a world that extends these rights.⁶⁰

Just as no nation should be forced to accept the tyranny of another nation, no individual should be forced to accept the tyranny of their own people. Freedom, justice, and peace for the world must begin with freedom, justice, and peace in the lives of individual human beings. – Barack Obama, Sept. 23, 2009; Sept. 23, 2010

One of my earliest memories from growing up in Hawaii is of sitting on my grandfather’s shoulders to see the astronauts from one of the Apollo space missions come ashore after a successful splashdown. You remember that no matter how young you are as a child. It’s one of those unforgettable moments when you first realize *the miracle that is what this country is capable of.* And I remember waving a little American flag on top of my grandfather’s shoulders, thinking about those astronauts and thinking about space.

And today, on this day, more than 40 years later, I took my daughters to the Kennedy Space Center. And even though we didn’t get to see the Space Shuttle *Endeavour* launch, we met some of the astronauts, and we toured the Space Shuttle *Atlantis*. And looking at my daughters, I thought of how things come full circle. I thought of all that we’ve achieved as a nation since I was their age, a little Brown boy sitting on my grandfather’s shoulders, and I thought about all I want us to achieve by the time they have children of their own. That’s my proof that the idea of America endures. That’s my evidence that our brave endeavor on this Earth continues.⁶¹

Abroad, America’s greatest source of strength has always been our ideals. Our idealism is rooted in the realities of history: that repression offers only the false promise of stability, that societies are more successful when their citizens are free.

Our interests and our conscience compel us to act on behalf of those who long for freedom. We believe our own security, and not just prosperity, is enhanced when we stand up for the rights of all nations and peoples to live in security and peace.⁶²

⁶⁰ June 22, 2011; March 28, 2011; Sept. 24, 2014; May 22, 2010.

⁶¹ April 29, 2011.

⁶² Jan. 27, 2010; May 25, 2011; Jan. 21, 2013; June 29, 2016.

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A fundamental part of our strategy for our security has to be America's support for those universal rights that formed the creed of our founding. And we will promote these values above all by *living them*, through our fidelity to the rule of law and our Constitution, *even when it's hard, even when we're being attacked, even when we're in the midst of war.*⁶³

I have known few greater honors than the opportunity to address the mother of parliaments at Westminster Hall. I come here today to reaffirm one of the oldest, one of the strongest alliances the world has ever known. The reason for this close friendship doesn't just have to do with our shared history, our shared heritage, our ties of language and culture, or even the strong partnership between our governments. Our relationship is special because of the values and beliefs that have united our people through the ages.

Centuries ago, when kings, emperors, and warlords reigned over much of the world, it was the English who first spelled out the rights and liberties of man in the Magna Carta. It was here, in this very hall, where the rule of law first developed, courts were established, disputes were settled, and citizens came to petition their leaders. Over time, the people of this nation waged a long and sometimes bloody struggle to expand and secure their freedom from the Crown. Propelled by the ideals of the Enlightenment, they would ultimately forge an English Bill of Rights and invest the power to govern in an elected parliament that's gathered here today.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." But the arc of our Nation, the arc of the world, does not bend towards justice or freedom or equality or prosperity on its own. It depends on us, on the choices we make.
– Barack Obama, May 15, 2016

What began on this island would inspire millions throughout the continent of Europe and across the world. For both of our nations, living up to the ideals enshrined in these founding documents has sometimes been difficult, and has always been a work in progress, but the longing for freedom and human dignity is not English or American or Western, it is universal, and it beats in every heart.⁶⁴

The values and ideals in our Constitution, Declaration of Independence, and Bill of Rights are the bedrock of our liberty and our security. We reject the false choice between our security and our ideals. We can and we must and we will protect both. – Barack Obama, May 22, 2009

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⁶³ May 22, 2010.

⁶⁴ May 25, 2011.

Democracy vs. Authoritarianism

More than any other system of government, democracy allows our most precious rights to find their fullest expression. Democracy enables us, through the hard, painstaking work of citizenship, to continually make our countries better, to solve new challenges, and right past wrongs.

Governments serve the individual, and not the other way around. – Barack Obama, Sept. 20, 2016

Other models have been tried, and they have failed: fascism and communism, rule by one man and rule by committee. And they failed for the same simple reason: They ignore the ultimate source of power and legitimacy; the will of the people. History offers a clear verdict: Governments that respect the will of their own people, that govern by consent, and not coercion, are more prosperous, more stable, and more successful than governments that do not. *Tyranny is no match for liberty.*⁶⁵

Democracy is about more than just holding elections; it's also about what happens between elections. Repression can take many forms, and too many nations, even those that have elections, are plagued by problems that condemn their people to poverty. And no country is going to create wealth if its leaders exploit the economy to enrich themselves, or if police can be bought off by drug traffickers. No business wants to invest in a place where the government skims 20 percent off the top, or the head of the port authority is corrupt. No person wants to live in a society where the rule of law gives way to the rule of brutality and bribery. That is not democracy; that is tyranny, *even if occasionally you sprinkle an election in there.*

Our strongest leaders, from George Washington to Nelson Mandela, elevated the importance of building strong, democratic institutions over a thirst for perpetual power. – Barack Obama, Sept. 28, 2015

No country can afford the corruption that plagues the world like a cancer. Corruption is an obstacle to progress, for opportunity cannot thrive where individuals are oppressed and businesses have to pay bribes. The cancer of corruption has enriched too many governments and their cronies and enraged citizens from remote villages to iconic squares. To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history.

Capable, reliable, and transparent institutions are the key to success: strong Parliaments, honest police forces, independent judges, an independent press, a vibrant private sector, a civil society. Those are the things that give life to democracy, because that is what matters in people's everyday lives.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ June 29, 2016; Nov. 17, 2011; July 11, 2009; Jan. 24, 2012.

⁶⁶ July 11, 2009; Sept. 21, 2011; Sept. 23, 2009; May 28, 2014; Jan. 20, 2009.

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Inclusive democracy makes countries stronger. When opposition parties can seek power peacefully through the ballot, a country draws upon new ideas. When a free media can inform the public, corruption and abuse are exposed and can be rooted out. When civil society thrives, communities can solve problems that governments cannot necessarily solve alone. Governments of the people and by the people are more likely to act in the broader interests of their own people, rather than narrow interests of those in power.

Freedom of religion and expression lead to a strong and vibrant civil society that only strengthens the state. An enduring commitment to the rule of law is the only way to achieve the security that comes from justice for all people. Robust minority rights let societies benefit from the full measure of contributions from all citizens. I say this as the President of a country that not very long ago made it hard for somebody who looks like me to vote, much less be President of the United States. But it is precisely that capacity to change that enriches our countries.⁶⁷

There will always be some governments that try to resist the tide of democracy, who claim theirs is a better way. But around the world, people know the difference between us. We welcome freedom to speak, to assemble, to worship, to choose your leaders. They don't. We welcome the chance to compete for jobs and markets freely and fairly. They don't. When fundamental human rights are threatened around the world, we stand up and speak out. And they don't.

In many parts of the world there is a belief that strong leadership must tolerate no dissent. I hear it not only from America's adversaries, but privately, at least, I also hear it from some of our friends. I disagree. I believe a government that suppresses peaceful dissent is not showing strength; it is showing weakness, and it is showing fear. That's why our strongest leaders, from George Washington to Nelson Mandela, have elevated the importance of building strong, democratic institutions over a thirst for perpetual power. *The universal rights that were embraced by the U.N. Assembly depend on elections that are free and fair, on governance that is transparent and accountable, respect for the rights of women and minorities, justice that is equal and fair. Those are the elements of peace that can last.*⁶⁸

Democracy is about more than just holding elections; it's also about what happens between elections. No business wants to invest in a place where the government skims 20 percent off the top, or the head of the port authority is corrupt. No person wants to live in a society where the rule of law gives way to the rule of brutality and bribery. That is not democracy; that is tyranny, even if occasionally you sprinkle an election in there. – Barack Obama, July 11, 2009

⁶⁷ Sept. 28, 2015; Sept. 23, 2009; April 6, 2009.

⁶⁸ May 23, 2012; Sept. 28, 2015; Sept. 21, 2011.

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No matter who you are or where you come from or what you look like or what God you pray to, all of us want the right to educate our children, to make a decent wage, to care for the sick, and to be carried as far as our dreams and our deeds will take us. But that depends upon economies that tap the power of our people, including the potential of women and girls. That means letting entrepreneurs start a business without paying a bribe, and governments that support opportunity instead of stealing from their people.⁶⁹

When girls can go to school and get a job and pursue unlimited opportunity, that's when a country realizes its full potential.
– Barack Obama, Sept. 28, 2015

Repression cannot forge the social cohesion for nations to succeed. Technology is empowering civil society in ways that no iron fist can control. The history of the last two decades proves that in today's world, dictatorships are unstable. The strongmen of today become the spark of revolution tomorrow. You can jail your opponents, but you can't imprison ideas. You can try to control access to information, but you cannot turn a lie into truth. It is not a conspiracy of U.S.-backed NGOs* that expose corruption and raise the expectations of people around the globe; it's technology, social media, and the irreducible desire of people everywhere to make their own choices about how they are governed. Indeed, I believe that in today's world, the measure of strength is no longer defined by the control of territory. *Lasting prosperity does not come solely from the ability to access and extract raw materials. The strength of nations depends on the success of their people—their knowledge, their innovation, their imagination, their creativity, their drive, their opportunity—and that, in turn, depends upon individual rights and good governance and personal security. Internal repression and foreign aggression are both symptoms of the failure to provide this foundation.* To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict or blame their society's ills on the West, know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy.

Freedom is more powerful than fear.
– Barack Obama, Dec. 6, 2015

A politics and solidarity that depend on demonizing others, that draws on religious sectarianism or narrow tribalism or jingoism, may at times look like strength in the moment, but over time its weakness will be exposed. And history tells us that the dark forces unleashed by this type of politics surely makes all of us less secure. Our world has been there before. We gain nothing from going back. Instead, I believe that we must go forward in pursuit of our ideals.⁷⁰

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⁶⁹ Sept. 24, 2014; Sept. 23, 2010.

⁷⁰ Sept. 28, 2015; May 28, 2014; Jan. 20, 2009. * NGO: non-governmental organization.

Individual Rights—Advancing and Defending

Democracies must never forget that part of the price of our own freedom is standing up for the freedom of others. As we have for over 60 years, America takes actions [to promote peace, advance freedom, and help other countries] because our destiny is connected to those beyond our shores. But we also do it because it is right. For America must always stand on the side of freedom and human dignity—always. That is the source, the moral source, of America’s authority.⁷¹

America’s support for democracy and human rights goes beyond idealism; it is a matter of national security. We know from experience that those who defend these values for their people have been our closest friends and allies, while those who have denied those rights, whether terrorist groups or tyrannical governments, have chosen to be our adversaries. – Barack Obama, May 28, 2014; Sept. 23, 2010

Americans have fought and died around the globe to protect the right of all people to express their views, even views that we profoundly disagree with. We do not do so because we support hateful speech, but because our Founders understood that without such protections, the capacity of each individual to express their own views and practice their own faith may be threatened. We do so because in a diverse society, efforts to restrict speech can quickly become a tool to silence critics and oppress minorities. The strongest weapon against hateful speech is not repression, it is more speech, the voices that lift up the values of understanding and mutual respect.⁷²

Democracy can buckle when it gives in to fear. So just as we, as citizens, must remain vigilant against external aggression, we must guard against a weakening of the values that make us who we are. – Barack Obama, Jan. 10, 2017

We partner with emerging democracies to help strengthen the institutions upon which good governance depends. We encourage open government because democracies depend on an informed and active citizenry. We help strengthen civil societies because they empower our citizens to hold their governments accountable. Civil society is the conscience of our communities. And we advance the rights of all people—women, minorities, and indigenous cultures—because when societies harness the potential of all their citizens, these societies are more successful, they are more prosperous, and they are more just.⁷³

⁷¹ Nov. 8, 2010; Sept. 23, 2010; Jan. 27, 2010; Dec. 1, 2009.

⁷² Sept. 25, 2012.

⁷³ Nov. 17, 2011; Sept. 23, 2010.

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Our vision for the future of this U.N. Assembly, my belief in moving forward rather than backwards, requires us to defend the democratic principles that allow societies to succeed. Let me start from a simple premise: Catastrophes like what we are seeing in Syria [a brutal conflict], do not take place in countries where there is genuine democracy and respect for the universal values this institution is supposed to defend.⁷⁴

Perhaps those of us who have been promoting democracy feel somewhat discouraged since the end of the Cold War, because we've learned that liberal democracy will not just wash across the globe in a single wave. It turns out, building accountable institutions is hard work, the work of generations. The gains are often fragile. Sometimes, we take one step forward and then two steps back. In countries held together by borders drawn by colonial powers, with ethnic enclaves and tribal divisions, politics and elections can sometimes appear to be a zero-sum game. And so, given the difficulty in forging true democracy in the face of these pressures, it's no surprise that some argue that the future favors the strongman, a top-down model, rather than strong, democratic institutions. But I believe this thinking is wrong. I believe the road of true democracy remains the better path. I believe that in the 21st century, economies can only grow to a certain point until they need to open up, because entrepreneurs need to access information in order to invent; young people need a global education in order to thrive; independent media needs to check the abuses of power. Without this evolution, ultimately, the expectations of people will not be met; suppression and stagnation will set in. And history shows that strongmen are then left with two paths: permanent crackdown, which sparks strife at home; or scapegoating enemies abroad, which can lead to war.

In Europe, the progress of those countries in the former Soviet bloc that embraced democracy stand in clear contrast to those that did not. After all, the people of Ukraine did not take to the streets because of some plot imposed from abroad. They took to the streets because their leadership was for sale and they had no recourse. They demanded change because they saw life get better for people in the Baltics and in Poland, societies that were more liberal and democratic and open than their own.

So those of us who believe in democracy need to speak out forcefully, because both the facts and history, I believe, are on our side. That doesn't mean democracies are without flaws. It does mean that *the cure for what ails our democracies is greater engagement by our citizens, not less*. And despite the real and troubling areas where freedom appears in retreat, the fact remains that the number of democracies around the world has nearly doubled in the last 25 years.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Sept. 28, 2015.

⁷⁵ Sept. 20, 2016.

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The nonviolence practiced by men like Gandhi and King may not have been practical or possible in every circumstance, but the love that they preached, their fundamental faith in human progress, must always be the North Star that guides us on our journey. For if we lose that faith, if we dismiss it as silly or naive, if we divorce it from the decisions that we make on issues of war and peace, then we lose what's best about humanity. We lose our sense of possibility. We lose our moral compass. Let us reach for the world that ought to be.⁷⁶

More and more people are reaching toward the freedoms and values that we share. *No other nation has sacrificed more—in treasure, in the lives of our sons and daughters—so that these freedoms could take root and flourish around the world.* And no other nation has made the advancement of human rights and dignity so central to its foreign policy. And that's because it's central to who we are as Americans. It's also in our self-interest because democracies become our closest allies and partners.⁷⁷

We protect our own freedom and prosperity by extending it to others.
– Barack Obama, June 22, 2011

Time and again, nations and people have shown our capacity to change: to live up to humanity's highest ideals, to choose our better history. Last month, I stood where, 50 years ago, Martin Luther King, Jr., told America about his dream, at a time when many people of my race could not even vote for President. Earlier this year, I stood in the small cell where Nelson Mandela endured decades cut off from his own people and the world. Who are we to believe that today's challenges cannot be overcome, when we've seen what changes the human spirit can bring? Who can argue that the future belongs to those who seek to repress that spirit rather than those who seek to liberate it? I know what side of history I want to the United States of America to be on.⁷⁸

We are on the right side of history.
– Barack Obama, June 2, 2016

The currents of history may ebb and flow, but over time they move, decidedly, decisively, in a single direction. *History is on the side of freedom: free societies, free governments, free economies, free people.* And the future belongs to those who stand firm for those ideals.⁷⁹

Human rights are the birthright of every person. They stir in every soul. – Barack Obama, Sept. 24, 2013; Nov. 17, 2011

⁷⁶ Dec. 10, 2009.

⁷⁷ May 23, 2012.

⁷⁸ Sept. 24, 2013.

⁷⁹ Nov. 17, 2011.

III. Government, Congress, and Citizens

Democratic Government—Role and Purpose

American democracy has thrived because we have recognized the need for a government that, while limited, can still help us adapt to a changing world. On the fourth panel of the Jefferson Memorial is a quote I remember reading to my daughters during our first visit there. It says, “I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and constitutions, but...with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times.” The democracy designed by Jefferson and the other Founders was never intended to solve every problem with a new law or a new program. Having thrown off the tyranny of the British Empire, the first Americans were understandably skeptical of government. And ever since, we’ve held fast to the belief that government doesn’t have all the answers, and we have cherished and fiercely defended our individual freedom. That’s a strand of our Nation’s DNA.

But the other strand is the belief that there are some things we can only do together, as one Nation, and that our government must keep pace with the times. When America expanded from a few colonies to an entire continent and we needed a way to reach the Pacific, our government helped build the railroads. When we transitioned from an economy based on farms to one based on factories and workers needed new skills and training, our Nation set up a system of public high schools. When the markets crashed during the Depression and people lost their life savings, our government put in place a set of rules and safeguards to make sure that such a crisis never happened again, and then put a safety net in place to make sure that our elders would never be impoverished the way they had been. And because our markets and financial systems have evolved since then, we’re now putting in place new rules and safeguards to protect the American people.⁸⁰

It was the first Republican President, Abraham Lincoln, who said the role of government is to do for the people what they cannot do better for themselves. And he’d go on to begin that first intercontinental railroad and set up the first land-grant colleges. It was another Republican, Teddy Roosevelt, who said, “The object of government is the welfare of the people.” And he’s remembered for

⁸⁰ May 1, 2010.

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using the power of government to break up monopolies and establish our National Park System. Republican President Dwight Eisenhower launched the massive government undertaking known as the Interstate Highway System.

Of course, there have always been those who've opposed such efforts. They argue government intervention is usually inefficient, that it restricts individual freedom and dampens individual initiative. And in certain instances, that's been true. For many years, we had a welfare system that too often discouraged people from taking responsibility for their own upward mobility. At times, we've neglected the role of parents, rather than government, in cultivating a child's education. And sometimes regulations fail, and sometimes their benefits don't justify their costs. But what troubles me is when I hear people say that all of government is inherently bad. *One of my favorite signs during the healthcare debate was somebody who said, "Keep Your Government Hands Out Of My Medicare"—[laughter]—which is essentially saying, "Keep Government Out Of My Government-Run Health Care Plan."* [Laughter]

When our government is spoken of as some menacing, threatening foreign entity, it ignores the fact that in our democracy, government is us. We, the people, hold in our hands the power to choose our leaders and change our laws and shape our own destiny. Government's the police officers who are protecting our communities and the servicemen and women who are defending us abroad. Government is the roads you drove in on and the speed limits that kept you safe. Government is what ensures that mines adhere to safety standards and that oil spills are cleaned up by the companies that caused them.⁸¹

We know that too much government can stifle competition and deprive us of choice and burden us with debt. But we've also clearly seen the dangers of too little government, like when a lack of accountability on Wall Street nearly leads to the collapse of our entire economy.

So what we should be asking is not whether we need "big government" or a "small government," but how we can create a smarter and better government. Because in an era of iPods and TiVo, where we have more choices than ever before—even though I can't really work a lot of these things—[laughter]—but I have 23-year-olds who do it for me—[laughter]—government shouldn't try to dictate your lives, but it should give you the tools you need to succeed. Government shouldn't try to guarantee results, but it should guarantee a shot at opportunity for every American who's willing to work hard.

So yes, we can and should debate the role of government in our lives. But remember, as you are asked to meet the challenges of our time, remember that the ability for us to adapt our government to the needs of the age has helped make our democracy work since its inception.⁸²

⁸¹ May 1, 2010.

⁸² May 1, 2010.

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Yes, we are rugged individualists. Yes, we are strong and self-reliant. And it has been the drive and initiative of our workers and entrepreneurs that has made this economy the engine and the envy of the world. But there's always been another thread running throughout our history, a belief that we're all connected and that there are some things we can only do together as a nation.

We all remember Abraham Lincoln as the leader who saved our Union, founder of the Republican Party. But in the middle of a Civil War, he was also a leader who looked to the future; a Republican President who mobilized government to build the transcontinental railroad, launch the National Academy of Sciences, set up the first land-grant colleges. And leaders of both parties have followed the example he set. Ask yourselves: *Where would we be right now if the people who sat here [in Congress] before us decided not to build our highways, not to build our bridges, our dams, our airports? What would this country be like if we had chosen not to spend money on public high schools or research universities or community colleges? Millions of returning heroes, including my grandfather, had the opportunity to go to school because of the GI bill. Where would we be if they hadn't had that chance?*

How many jobs would it have cost us if past Congresses had decided not to support the basic research that led to the Internet and the computer chip? What kind of country would this be if this Chamber had voted down Social Security or Medicare just because it violated some rigid idea about what government could or could not do? How many Americans would have suffered as a result?

No single individual built America on their own. We built it together. We have been and always will be “one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all,” a nation with responsibilities to ourselves and to one another.⁸³

The measure of our success must be whether people can live in sustained freedom, dignity, and security. As John Kenneth Galbraith once said, “The common denominator of progress” is our people. It's not numbers, it's not abstractions, it's *how are people doing?* While the people who sent us here to Washington have different backgrounds, different stories, and different beliefs, the anxieties they face are the same. The aspirations they hold are shared: a job that pays the bills; a chance to get ahead; and most of all, the ability to give their children a better life.⁸⁴

There is a common heartbeat to humanity. Each of us, endowed with the dignity possessed by all children of God, has the grace to recognize ourselves in one another, to understand that we all seek the same love of family, the same fulfillment of a life well lived.
– Barack Obama, Sept. 25, 2012;
May 17, 2009

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⁸³ Sept. 8, 2011.

⁸⁴ Sept. 21, 2011; June 29, 2016; Jan. 27, 2010.

Congress, and Why We Serve

We serve to make people's lives better. We were sent here to look out for our fellow Americans the same way they look out for one another, every single day, usually without fanfare, all across this country. No matter who we are or where we come from, each of us is a part of something greater, something more consequential than party or political preference. We measure progress by the success of our people, by the jobs they can find and the quality of life those jobs offer, by the prospects of a small-business owner who dreams of turning a good idea into a thriving enterprise, by the opportunities for a better life that we pass on to our children. That's the project the American people want us to work on—together.

What we should be asking is not whether we need "big government" or a "small government," but how we can create a smarter and better government. Government shouldn't try to guarantee results, but it should guarantee a shot at opportunity for every American who's willing to work hard. – Barack Obama, May 1, 2010

What the American people hope, what they deserve, is for all of us in this Chamber, Democrats and Republicans, to focus on their lives, their hopes, their aspirations. And what I believe unites the people of this Nation—regardless of race or region or party, young or old, rich or poor—is the simple, profound belief in opportunity for all: the notion that if you work hard and take responsibility, you can get ahead in America.⁸⁵

Let's talk about the future and four big questions that I believe we as a country have to answer. First, how do we give everyone a fair shot at opportunity and security in this new economy? Second, how do we make technology work for us and not against us, especially when it comes to solving urgent challenges like climate change? Third, how do we keep America safe and lead the world without becoming its policeman? And finally, how can we make our politics reflect what's best in us and not what's worst?⁸⁶

Do you know what people are fed up with most of all? They're fed up with a town where compromise has become a dirty word. They work all day long, many of them scraping by, just to put food on the table. And when these Americans come home at night, bone tired, and turn on the news, all they see is the same partisan three-ring circus here in Washington. They see leaders who can't seem to come together and do what it takes to make life just a little bit better for ordinary Americans. They're offended by that. And they should be.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Jan. 10, 2017; Feb. 12, 2013; Jan. 25, 2011; Jan. 27, 2010; Jan. 28, 2014.

⁸⁶ Jan. 12, 2016.

⁸⁷ July 25, 2011.

Barack Obama: On America, Democracy, and International Security

Fifty-one years ago, John F. Kennedy declared to this Chamber that “the Constitution makes us not rivals for power, but partners for progress.” “It is my task,” he said, “to report the state of the Union; to improve it is the task of us all.” It is our unfinished task to make sure that this government works on behalf of the many, and not just the few; that it encourages free enterprise, rewards individual initiative, and opens the doors of opportunity to every child across this great Nation.

The American people don’t expect government to solve every problem. They don’t expect those of us in this Chamber to agree on every issue. But they do expect us to put the Nation’s interests before party.

History is scattered with the stories of those who held fast to rigid ideologies and refused to listen to those who disagreed. But those are not the Americans we remember. We remember the Americans who put country above self and set personal grievances aside for the greater good. We remember the Americans who held this country together during its most difficult hours, who put aside pride and party to form a more perfect Union.⁸⁸

The question for those of us here in Congress tonight is how we, all of us, can better reflect America’s hopes. Many of you have told me that this isn’t what you signed up for: arguing past each other on cable shows, the constant fundraising, always looking over your shoulder at how the base will react to every decision. Imagine if we broke out of these tired old patterns. Imagine if we did something different. Understand, a better politics isn’t one where Democrats abandon their agenda or Republicans simply embrace mine. A better politics is one where we appeal to each other’s basic decency instead of our basest fears. A better politics is one where we debate without demonizing each other, where we talk issues and values and principles and facts rather than “gotcha” moments or trivial gaffes or fake controversies that have nothing to do with people’s daily lives.⁸⁹

Every American who is sitting here tonight in Congress loves this country and wants it to succeed. I know that. That must be the starting point for every debate we have in the coming months and where we return after those debates are done. That is the foundation on which the American people expect us to build common ground. And if we do, if we come together and lift this Nation from the depths of this crisis [the Great Recession], if we put our people back to work and restart the engine of our prosperity, if we confront without fear the challenges of our time and summon that enduring spirit of an America that does not quit, then someday years from now our children can tell their children that this was the time when we performed, in the words that are carved into this very Chamber, “something worthy to be remembered.”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Feb. 12, 2013; July 25, 2011.

⁸⁹ Jan. 20, 2015.

⁹⁰ Feb. 24, 2009.

Barack Obama: On America, Democracy, and International Security

My only agenda is the same as the one I've had since the day I swore an oath on the steps of this Capitol: to do what I believe is best for America. If you share the broad vision I outlined tonight, I ask you to join me in the work at hand. If you disagree with parts of it, I hope you'll at least work with me where you do agree. And I commit to every Republican here tonight that I will not only seek out your ideas, I will seek to work with you to make this country stronger. Because I want this Chamber, I want this city to reflect the truth: that for all our blind spots and shortcomings, we are a people with the strength and generosity of spirit to bridge divides, to unite in common effort, to help our neighbors, whether down the street or on the other side of the world.

What our country needs from us in Congress right now is a common purpose, a higher purpose. Progress has been this Nation's hallmark, and a sense of common purpose has always propelled America forward.
– Barack Obama, Nov. 20, 2014;
May 15, 2016; Jan. 20, 2015

I want our actions to tell every child in every neighborhood, your life matters, and we are committed to improving your life chances, as committed as we are to working on behalf of our own kids. I want future generations to know that we are a people who see our differences as a great gift, that we're a people who value the dignity and worth of every citizen: man and woman, young and old, Black and White, Latino, Asian, immigrant, Native American, gay, straight, Americans with mental illness or physical disability. *Everybody matters.*⁹¹

We cannot mistake absolutism for principle or substitute spectacle for politics or treat name-calling as reasoned debate. We must act. We must act, knowing that our work will be imperfect. We must act, knowing that today's victories will be only partial and that it will be up to those who stand here in 4 years and 40 years and 400 years hence to advance the timeless spirit once conferred to us in a spare Philadelphia hall.⁹²

Think back to the sense of unity that prevailed on 9/11.
– Barack Obama, May 1, 2011

Sometimes all you hear in Washington is the clamor of politics. And all that noise can drown out the voices of the people who sent you there. So when I took office, I decided that each night I would read ten letters out of the tens of thousands that are sent to us by ordinary Americans every day. This is my modest effort to remind myself of why I ran in the first place. Some of these letters tell stories of heartache and struggle. Some express gratitude, some express anger. I'd say a good solid third call me an idiot, which is how I know that I'm getting a good, representative sample. *[Laughter]*⁹³

⁹¹ Jan. 20, 2015.

⁹² Jan. 21, 2013.

⁹³ May 1, 2010.

Barack Obama: On America, Democracy, and International Security

*There is no stronger sign of leadership than putting future generations first. We have always believed that the future of our children and grandchildren will be better if other people's children and grandchildren are more prosperous and more free. That is our interests and our ideals. And if we fail to meet that responsibility, who would take our place, and what kind of world would we pass on? Our action, our leadership, is essential to the cause of human dignity. And so we must act, and lead, with confidence in our ideals and an abiding faith in the character of our people, who sent us all here [to represent them] today.*⁹⁴

Being true to our founding documents does not require us to agree on every contour of life. This vast and diverse citizenry will not always agree on every issue, nor should we. But I also know that we, as a country, cannot sustain our leadership, nor navigate the momentous challenges of our time, if we allow ourselves to be split asunder by the same rancor and cynicism and partisanship that has in recent times poisoned our national discourse. I believe with every fiber of my being that we, as Americans, can still come together behind a common purpose. For our values are not simply words written into parchment, they are a creed that calls us together and that has carried us through the darkest of storms as one Nation, as one people.

We all have to start with the premise that each of our fellow citizens loves this country just as much as we do; that they value hard work and family just like we do; that their children are just as curious and hopeful and worthy of love as our own. And that's not easy to do. For too many of us, it's become safer to retreat into our own bubbles, whether in our neighborhoods or on college campuses or places of worship or especially our social media feeds, surrounded by people who look like us and share the same political outlook and never challenge our assumptions. And the rise of naked partisanship and increasing economic and regional stratification, the splintering of our media into a channel for every taste, all this makes this great sorting seem natural, even inevitable. And increasingly, we become so secure in our bubbles that we start accepting only information, whether it's true or not, that fits our opinions, instead of basing our opinions on the evidence that is out there.⁹⁵

We remember the Americans who put country above self and set personal grievances aside for the greater good. We remember the Americans who held this country together during its most difficult hours, who put aside pride and party to form a more perfect Union. – Barack Obama, July 25, 2011

⁹⁴ Sept. 28, 2015; May 25, 2011.

⁹⁵ Jan. 21, 2013; Dec. 1, 2009; Jan. 10, 2017

Barack Obama: On America, Democracy, and International Security

Even in the most trying times, amid the most difficult circumstances, in us there is a generosity, a resilience, a decency, and a determination that perseveres, a willingness to take responsibility for our future and for posterity. [The American people's] resolve must be our inspiration. Their concerns must be our cause. And we elected leaders must show them and all our people that we are equal to the task before us.⁹⁶

I stand here today, as President and as an African American, on the 55th anniversary of the day that the Supreme Court handed down the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Now, *Brown* was, of course, the first major step in dismantling the “separate but equal” doctrine, but it would take a number of years and a nationwide movement to fully realize the dream of civil rights for all of God’s children. There were freedom rides and lunch counters and billy clubs; there was also a Civil Rights Commission appointed by President Eisenhower. It was the 12 resolutions recommended by this commission that would ultimately become law in the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

There were six members of this commission. It included five whites and one African American, Democrats and Republicans: two southern governors, the dean of a southern law school, a midwestern university president, and the president of Notre Dame, Father Ted Hesburgh. So they worked for two years, and at times, President Eisenhower had to intervene personally since no hotel or restaurant in the South would serve the black and white members of the commission together. And finally, when they reached an impasse in Louisiana, Father Ted flew them all to Notre Dame’s retreat in Land O’Lakes, Wisconsin, where they eventually overcame their differences and hammered out a final deal.

And years later, President Eisenhower asked Father Ted how on earth he was able to broker an agreement between men of such different backgrounds and beliefs. And Father Ted simply said that during their first dinner in Wisconsin, they discovered they were all fishermen. [*Laughter*] And so he quickly readied a boat for a twilight trip out on the lake. And they fished, and they talked, and they changed the course of history.

Now, I will not pretend that the challenges we face will be easy, or that the answers will come quickly, or that all our differences and divisions will fade happily away, because life is not that simple. It never has been.

But remember the lessons of movements for change both large and small. Remember that each of us, endowed with the dignity possessed by all children of God, has the grace to recognize ourselves in one another, to understand that we all seek the same love of family, the same fulfillment of a life well lived. *Remember that in the end, in some way, we are all fishermen.*⁹⁷

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⁹⁶ Feb. 24, 2009.

⁹⁷ May 17, 2009.

Citizens

Citizen Participation

Our Constitution has no power on its own. We, the people, give it power. We, the people, give it meaning with our participation and with the choices that we make and the alliances that we forge. Whether or not we stand up for our freedoms, whether or not we respect and enforce the rule of law.

We remain the wealthiest, most powerful, and most respected nation on Earth. Our youth, our drive, our diversity and openness, our boundless capacity for risk and reinvention means that the future should be ours. But that potential will only be realized if our democracy works; only if our politics better reflects the decency of our people; only if all of us, regardless of party affiliation or particular interests, help restore the sense of common purpose that we so badly need right now. It's not about what America can do for us, it's about what can be done by us, together, through the hard and frustrating, but absolutely necessary work of self-government. In our democracies we are blessed with the greatest form of government ever known to man. Democracy can be messy and rough, but despite all its flaws and its frustrations, our experiment in democracy has worked better than any form of government on Earth.⁹⁸

Despite all its flaws and its frustrations, our experiment in democracy has worked better than any form of government on Earth.
– Barack Obama, May 1, 2010

My fellow Americans, our collective futures depend on your willingness to uphold your duties as a citizen. To vote. To speak out. To stand up for others, especially the weak, especially the vulnerable, knowing that each of us is only here because somebody, somewhere, stood up for us. We need every American to stay active in our public life—and not just during election time—so that our public life reflects the goodness and the decency that I see in the American people every single day.⁹⁹

The joyous work of citizenship. – Barack Obama, Jan. 19, 2017

The elemental test of any democracy is whether people with differing points of view can learn from each other and work with each other and find a way forward together. The greatness of our democracy is grounded in our ability to move beyond our differences. Democracy does not require uniformity, but does require a basic sense of solidarity. Citizenship demands a sense of common purpose.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Jan. 10, 2017; May 5, 2013; Nov. 17, 2011; May 1, 2010.

⁹⁹ Jan. 12, 2016.

¹⁰⁰ May 9, 2010; Aug. 31, 2010; Jan. 10, 2017; Jan. 28, 2014.

Barack Obama: On America, Democracy, and International Security

The American people may have voted for divided government, but they didn't vote for a dysfunctional government. So I'm asking you all to make your voices heard. If you want a balanced approach to reducing the deficit, let your Member of Congress know. If you believe we can solve this problem through compromise, send that message. America, after all, has always been a grand experiment in compromise.¹⁰¹

Citizenship means standing up for the lives that gun violence steals from us each day. In two months, more than a thousand birthdays, graduations, anniversaries have been stolen from our lives by a bullet from a gun—more than a thousand. *We need to make it harder for people to buy powerful assault weapons.* I know there are some who reject any gun safety measures. But the fact is that our intelligence and law enforcement agencies—no matter how effective they are—cannot identify every would-be mass shooter, whether that individual is motivated by ISIL* or some other hateful ideology. What we can do—and must do—is make it harder for them to kill.¹⁰²

In his own Farewell Address, George Washington wrote that self-government is the underpinning of our safety, prosperity, and liberty, but “from different causes and from different quarters much pains will be taken...to weaken in your minds the conviction of this truth.” And so we have to preserve this truth with “jealous anxiety” and reject “the first dawning of every attempt to alienate any portion of our country from the rest or to enfeeble the sacred ties” that make us one.

America, we weaken those ties when we allow our political dialogue to become so corrosive that people of good character aren't even willing to enter into public service; so coarse with rancor that Americans with whom we disagree are seen not just as misguided, but as malevolent. We weaken those ties when we define some of us as more American than others, when we write off the whole system as inevitably corrupt, and when we sit back and blame the leaders we elect without examining our own role in electing them.

Our democracy is threatened whenever we take it for granted. America won't work if its citizens are uninformed, if its citizens are apathetic, if its citizens check out and leave democracy to those who don't have the best interests of all the people at heart. – Barack Obama, Jan. 10, 2017; May 9, 2010

It falls to each of us to be those anxious, jealous guardians of our democracy; to embrace the joyous task we've been given to continually try to improve this great Nation of ours. Because for all our outward differences, we, in fact, all share the same proud title, *the most important office in a democracy: citizen.*¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ July 25, 2011.

¹⁰² Jan. 28, 2014; Feb. 12, 2013; Dec. 6, 2015. * ISIL: Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

¹⁰³ Jan. 10, 2017.

Barack Obama: On America, Democracy, and International Security

Democracy needs you. Not just when there's an election, not just when your own narrow interest is at stake, but over the full span of a lifetime. If you're tired of arguing with strangers on the Internet, try talking with one of them in real life. If something needs fixing, then lace up your shoes and do some organizing. If you're disappointed by your elected officials, grab a clipboard, get some signatures, and run for office yourself. Show up. Dive in. Stay at it.¹⁰⁴

*In your daily acts of citizenship,
I see our future unfolding.
– Barack Obama, Jan. 12, 2016*

The Founders left us the power—each of us—to adapt to changing times. They left us the keys to a system of self-government, the tools to do big things and important things together that we could not possibly do alone: to stretch railroads and electricity and a highway system across a sprawling continent; to educate our people with a system of public schools and land-grant colleges; to care for the sick and the vulnerable and provide a basic level of protection from falling into abject poverty in the wealthiest nation on Earth; to conquer fascism and disease; to visit the Moon and Mars; to gradually secure our God-given rights for all of our citizens, regardless of who they are or what they look like or who they love.

The Founders trusted us with this awesome authority. We should trust ourselves with it too. Because when we don't, when we turn away and get discouraged and cynical and abdicate that authority, we grant our silent consent to someone who will gladly claim it.

That's how we end up with lobbyists who set the agenda and policies detached from what middle-class families face every day, the well-connected who publicly demand that Washington stay out of their business and then whisper in government's ear for special treatment that you don't get.

That's how a small minority of lawmakers get cover to defeat something the vast majority of their constituents want. That's how our political system gets consumed by small things when we are a people called to do great things.¹⁰⁵

When voting rates in America are some of the lowest among advanced democracies, we should be making it easier, not harder, to vote. When Congress is dysfunctional, we should draw our congressional districts to encourage politicians to cater to common sense and not rigid extremes. But remember, none of this happens on its own. All of this depends on our participation; on each of us accepting the responsibility of citizenship, regardless of which way the pendulum of power happens to be swinging. – Barack Obama, Jan. 10, 2017

Those who oppose change, those who benefit from an unjust status quo, have always bet on the public's cynicism or the public's complacency. – Barack Obama, May 14, 2012

¹⁰⁴ Jan. 10, 2017.

¹⁰⁵ May 5, 2013.

Barack Obama: On America, Democracy, and International Security

Voting

We must all do our part to make sure our God-given rights are protected here at home. That includes one of the most fundamental rights of a democracy: the right to vote. Now, when any American, no matter where they live or what their party, are denied that right because they can't afford to wait for five or six or seven hours just to cast their ballot, we are betraying our ideals. No one should have to wait more than a half hour to vote. Citizenship means standing up for everyone's right to vote. *It should be the power of our vote, not the size of our bank accounts, that drives our democracy.*¹⁰⁶

Election day is a day of hope, a day of possibility. Americans all across this country go to the polls and cast ballots for the future they want to see.
– Barack Obama, Nov. 4, 2009

If we want to reverse wage and earnings inequality trends, there are a bunch of policies that would make a real difference. We could raise the minimum wage. We could modernize our infrastructure. We could invest in early childhood education. We could make college more affordable. We could close tax loopholes on hedge fund managers and take that money and give tax breaks to help families with childcare or retirement. And if we did these things, then we'd help to restore the sense that hard work is rewarded, and we could build an economy that truly works for everybody.

Now, the reason some of these things have not happened, even though the majority of people approve of them, is really simple. It's not because I wasn't proposing them. It wasn't because the facts and the evidence showed they wouldn't work. It was because a huge chunk of Americans, especially young people, do not vote.

In 2014, voter turnout was the lowest since World War II. *Fewer than one in five young people showed up to vote—2014. And the four who stayed home determined the course of this country just as much as the single one who voted, because apathy has consequences.* It determines who our Congress is. It determines what policies they prioritize. It even, for example, determines whether a really highly qualified Supreme Court nominee receives the courtesy of a hearing and a vote in the United States Senate.¹⁰⁷

The elderly woman who will wait in line as long as she has to to cast her vote, the new citizen who casts his vote for the first time, the volunteers at the polls who believe every vote should count—each of them, in different ways, knows how much that precious right is worth. – Barack Obama, Jan. 12, 2016

¹⁰⁶ Feb. 12, 2013; Jan. 28, 2014.

¹⁰⁷ May 15, 2016.

Barack Obama: On America, Democracy, and International Security

One of the reasons that people don't vote is because they don't see the changes they were looking for right away. Well, none of the great strides in our history happened right away. It took Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP decades to win *Brown v. Board of Education* and then another decade after that to secure the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. And it took more time after that for it to start working. It took a proud daughter of New Jersey, Alice Paul, years of organizing marches and hunger strikes and protests and drafting hundreds of pieces of legislation and writing letters and giving speeches and working with congressional leaders before she and other suffragists finally helped win women the right to vote.

The roar of women demanding the vote. – Barack Obama, May 7, 2016

Each stage along the way required compromise. Sometimes, you took half a loaf. You forged allies. Sometimes, you lost on an issue, and then you came back to fight another day. That's how democracy works. So you've got to be committed to participating not just if you get immediate gratification, but you've got to be a citizen full time, all the time.¹⁰⁸

It is absolutely true that 50 years after the Voting Rights Act, there are still too many barriers in this country to vote. There are too many people trying to erect new barriers to voting. This is the only advanced democracy on Earth that goes out of its way to make it difficult for people to vote. And there's a reason for that. There's a legacy to that.

There are too many people trying to erect new barriers to voting. – Barack Obama, May 7, 2016

Surely we can agree that the right to vote is sacred, that it's being denied to too many, and that on this 50th anniversary of the great march from Selma to Montgomery and the passage of the Voting Rights Act, we can come together, Democrats and Republicans, to make voting easier for every single American.¹⁰⁹

You've got to vote all the time. That's how we change our politics; by electing people at every level who are representative of and accountable to us. When we don't vote, we give away our power, disenfranchise ourselves. – Barack Obama, May 7, 2016

You and I, as citizens, have the obligation to shape the debates of our time—not only with the votes we cast, but with the voices we lift in defense of our most ancient values and enduring ideals. – Barack Obama, Jan. 21, 2013

¹⁰⁸ May 15, 2016.

¹⁰⁹ May 7, 2016; Jan. 20, 2015.

Barack Obama: On America, Democracy, and International Security

Change

Have faith in democracy. Look, I know it's not always pretty. Really, I know. But it's how, bit by bit, generation by generation, we have made progress in this Nation. That's how we banned child labor. That's how we cleaned up our air and our water. That's how we passed programs like Social Security and Medicare that lifted millions of seniors out of poverty.

None of these changes happened overnight. They didn't happen because some charismatic leader got everybody suddenly to agree on everything. It didn't happen because some massive political revolution occurred. It actually happened over the course of years of advocacy and organizing and alliance building and dealmaking and the changing of public opinion. If you want to change this country for the better, you've got to participate.¹¹⁰

An unyielding belief in the ability of individual men and women to change their communities and their circumstances and their countries for the better. – Barack Obama, Sept. 24, 2014

Change isn't something that happens every four years or eight years; change is not placing your faith in any particular politician and then just putting your feet up and saying, okay, go. [Laughter] Change is the effort of committed citizens who hitch their wagons to something bigger than themselves and fight for it every single day.

Thurgood Marshall graduated from Howard Law, went home to Baltimore, started his own law practice. He and his mentor, Charles Hamilton Houston, rolled up their sleeves, and they set out to overturn segregation. They worked through the NAACP, filed dozens of lawsuits, fought dozens of cases. And after nearly 20 years of effort—20 years—Thurgood Marshall ultimately succeeded in bringing his righteous cause before the Supreme Court and securing the ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* that separate could never be equal. Twenty years.¹¹¹

Change requires more than just speaking out. It requires listening as well. In particular, it requires listening to those with whom you disagree and being prepared to compromise. When I was a State senator, I helped pass Illinois' first racial profiling law and one of the first laws in the nation requiring the videotaping of confessions in capital cases. And we were successful because, early on, I engaged law enforcement. I didn't say to them, oh, you guys are so racist, you need to do something. I understood, as many of you do, that the overwhelming majority of police officers are good and honest and courageous and fair and love the communities they serve.

And we knew there were some bad apples and that even good cops with the best of intentions—including, by the way, African-American police officers—

¹¹⁰ May 15, 2016.

¹¹¹ May 7, 2016.

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might have unconscious biases, as we all do. So we engaged, and we listened, and we kept working until we built consensus. And because we took the time to listen, we crafted legislation that was good for the police, because it improved the trust and cooperation of the community, and it was good for communities, who were less likely to be treated unfairly. And I can say this unequivocally: Without at least the acceptance of the police organizations in Illinois, I could never have gotten those bills passed. It's very simple. They would have blocked them.

The point is, you need allies in a democracy. That's just the way it is. It can be frustrating, and it can be slow. But history teaches us that the alternative to democracy is always worse. That's not just true in this country. Go to any country where the give and take of democracy has been repealed by one-party rule, and I will show you a country that does not work.

And democracy requires compromise, even when you are a 100-percent right. This is hard to explain sometimes. You can be completely right, and you still are going to have to engage folks who disagree with you. If you think that the only way forward is to be as uncompromising as possible, you will feel good about yourself, you will enjoy a certain moral purity, but you're not going to get what you want. And if you don't get what you want long enough, you will eventually think the whole system is rigged. And that will lead to more cynicism and less participation and a downward spiral of more injustice and more anger and more despair. And that's never been the source of our progress. That's how we cheat ourselves of progress.

We remember Dr. King's soaring oratory, the power of his "Letter From a Birmingham Jail," the marches he led. But he also sat down with President Lyndon Johnson in the Oval Office to try and get a Civil Rights Act and a Voting Rights Act passed. And those seminal bills were not perfect, but they made things better. And you know what, I will take better every time. *Better is good. Better is good, because you consolidate your gains and then you move on to the next fight from a stronger position. That's how you change things.* Better may not be great, but it's good. That's how progress happens, in societies and in our own lives.¹¹²

Democracy is hard. But it's right. Changing our laws means doing the hard work of changing minds and changing votes, one by one. That faith that I placed all those years ago in the power of ordinary Americans to bring about change, that faith has been rewarded in ways I could not have possibly imagined. And I hope your faith has, too.¹¹³

Democracy needs you. Not just when there's an election, not just when your own narrow interest is at stake, but over the full span of a lifetime. – Barack Obama, Jan. 10, 2017

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¹¹² May 7, 2016; May 15, 2016.

¹¹³ April 29, 2011; Jan. 10, 2017.

A Better Politics

Debate: Facts, Knowledge, and Opposing Views

Facts and Knowledge:

Politics is a battle of ideas. That's how our democracy was designed. In the course of a healthy debate, we prioritize different goals, and the different means of reaching them. But without some common baseline of facts, without a willingness to admit new information and concede that your opponent might be making a fair point, and that science and reason matter, then we're going to keep talking past each other, and we'll make common ground and compromise impossible. We have to agree that facts and evidence matter.¹¹⁴

"Everybody is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts." – Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, quoted by Barack Obama, May 1, 2010

When our leaders express a disdain for facts, when they're not held accountable for repeating falsehoods and just making stuff up, while actual experts are dismissed as elitists, then we've got a problem. *You know, it's interesting that if we get sick, we actually want to make sure the doctor has, like, gone to medical school, they know what they're talking about. If we get on a plane, we say we really want a pilot to be able to pilot the plane. [Laughter]* And yet, in our public lives, we suddenly think, "I don't want somebody who's done it before." Look, *the rejection of facts, the rejection of reason and science, that is the path to decline.* It calls to mind the words of Carl Sagan, who said, "We can judge our progress by the courage of our questions and the depths of our answers, our willingness to embrace what is true rather than what feels good."¹¹⁵

Sixty years ago, when the Russians beat us into space, we didn't deny Sputnik was up there. – Barack Obama, Jan. 12, 2016

Today's 24/7 echo chamber amplifies the most inflammatory soundbites louder and faster than ever before. And it's also, however, given us unprecedented choice. Whereas most Americans used to get their news from the same three networks over dinner or a few influential papers on Sunday morning, we now have the option to get our information from any number of blogs or websites or cable news shows. And this can have both a good and bad development for democracy. For if we choose only to expose ourselves to opinions and viewpoints that are in line with our own, studies suggest that we become more polarized,

¹¹⁴ Jan. 10, 2017; May 15, 2016.

¹¹⁵ May 15, 2016.

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more set in our ways. That will only reinforce and even deepen the political divides in this country.

But if we choose to actively seek out information that challenges our assumptions and our beliefs, perhaps we can begin to understand where the people who disagree with us are coming from. Now, this requires us to agree on a certain set of facts to debate from. That's why we need a vibrant and thriving news business that is separate from opinionmakers and talking heads. That's why we need an educated citizenry that values hard evidence and not just assertion. As Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan famously once said, "*Everybody is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts.*"¹¹⁶

Ironically, the flood of information hasn't made us more discerning of the truth. In some ways, it's just made us more confident in our ignorance. [Laughter] We assume whatever is on the web must be true. We search for sites that just reinforce our own predispositions. Opinions masquerade as facts. The wildest conspiracy theories are taken for gospel.

How can elected officials rage about deficits when we propose to spend money on preschool for kids, but not when we're cutting taxes for corporations? How do we excuse ethical lapses in our own party, but pounce when the other party does the same thing? It's not just dishonest, this selective sorting of the facts; it's self-defeating. Because, as my mom used to tell me, reality has a way of catching up with you.¹¹⁷

Facts, evidence, reason, logic, an understanding of science—these are good things. These are qualities you want in people making policy. These are qualities you want to continue to cultivate in yourselves as citizens. That might seem obvious. [Laughter] We traditionally have valued those things. But if you were listening to today's political debate, you might wonder where this strain of anti-intellectualism came from. Let me be as clear as I can be. *In politics and in life, ignorance is not a virtue. That's not challenging political correctness.* [Laughter] *That's just not knowing what you're talking about.* [Laughter] And yet we've become confused about this.

Look, our Nation's Founders—Franklin, Madison, Hamilton, Jefferson—were born of the Enlightenment. They sought to escape superstition and sectarianism and tribalism and know-nothingness. [Laughter] They believed in rational thought and experimentation and the capacity of informed citizens to master our own fates. That is embedded in our constitutional design. That spirit informed our inventors and our explorers. That's what built this country.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ May 1, 2010.

¹¹⁷ May 15, 2016; Jan. 10, 2017.

¹¹⁸ May 15, 2016.

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Opposing Views and the Democratic Process:

The practice of listening to opposing views is essential for effective citizenship. It is essential for our democracy. And so too is the practice of engaging in different experiences with different kinds of people. If you grew up in a big city, spend some time with somebody who grew up in a rural town. If you find yourself only hanging around with people of your own race or ethnicity or religion, include people in your circle who have different backgrounds and life experiences. You'll learn what it's like to walk in somebody else's shoes, and in the process, you will help to make this democracy work.¹¹⁹

Information can become a distraction, a diversion, a form of entertainment, rather than a tool of empowerment, rather than the means of emancipation. So all of this is not only putting pressure on you, it's putting new pressure on our country and on our democracy. – Barack Obama, May 9, 2010

Democracy gives us a process designed for us to settle our disputes with argument and ideas and votes instead of violence and simple majority rule. So don't try to shut folks out, don't try to shut them down, no matter how much you might disagree with them. There will be times when you shouldn't compromise your core values, your integrity, and you will have the responsibility to speak up in the face of injustice. But listen. Engage. If the other side has a point, learn from them. If they're wrong, rebut them. Stand up for what you believe in. Use your logic and reason and words. And by doing so, you'll strengthen your own position, and you'll hone your arguments. And maybe you'll learn something, and have a new understanding not only about what your opponents believe, but maybe what you believe. Either way, you win. And more importantly, our democracy wins.¹²⁰

It's important that all of us debate without impugning each other's character. – Barack Obama, Nov. 20, 2014

The strongest weapon against hateful speech is not repression, it is more speech, the voices that lift up the values of understanding and mutual respect. – Barack Obama, Sept. 25, 2012

The elemental test of any democracy is whether people with differing points of view can learn from each other and work with each other and find a way forward together. The greatness of our democracy is grounded in our ability to move beyond our differences. – Barack Obama, May 9, 2010; Aug. 31, 2010

¹¹⁹ May 1, 2010.

¹²⁰ May 7, 2016; May 15, 2016.

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Respect, Courtesy, and Civility

One way to keep our democracy healthy is to maintain a basic level of civility in our public debate. These arguments we're having over government and healthcare and war and taxes, these are serious arguments. They should arouse people's passions, and it's important for everybody to join in the debate with all the vigor that the maintenance of a free people requires.

But we can't expect to solve our problems if all we do is tear each other down. You can disagree with a certain policy without demonizing the person who espouses it. You can question somebody's views and their judgment without questioning their motives or their patriotism. Throwing around phrases like "socialists" and "Soviet-style takeover" and "fascist" and "rightwing nut" may grab headlines, but it also has the effect of comparing our government, our political opponents, to authoritarian, even murderous regimes.

Now, we've seen this kind of politics in the past. It's been practiced by both fringes of the ideological spectrum, by the left and the right, since our Nation's birth. But it's starting to creep into the center of our discourse. And the problem with it is not the hurt feelings or the bruised egos of the public officials who are criticized. Remember, they signed up for it. The problem is that this kind of vilification and over-the-top rhetoric closes the door to the possibility of compromise. It undermines democratic deliberation. It prevents learning, since, after all, why should we listen to a "fascist" or a "socialist" or a "rightwing nut" or a "leftwing nut"?

It makes it nearly impossible for people who have legitimate but bridgeable differences to sit down at the same table and hash things out. It robs us of a rational and serious debate, the one we need to have about the very real and very big challenges facing this Nation. It coarsens our culture, and at its worst, it can send signals to the most extreme elements of our society that perhaps violence is a justifiable response.

So what do we do? As I found out after a year in the White House, changing this type of politics is not easy. And part of what civility requires is that we recall the simple lesson most of us learned from our parents: Treat others as you would like to be treated, with courtesy and respect.¹²¹

It's not about what America can do for us, it's about what can be done by us, together, through the hard and frustrating, but absolutely necessary work of self-government. – Barack Obama, May 5, 2013

A few days after the Democratic nomination, I received an email from a doctor who told me that while he voted for me in the Illinois primary, he had a serious concern that might prevent him from voting for me in the general election. He

¹²¹ May 1, 2010.

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described himself as a Christian who was strongly pro-life, but that was not what was preventing him, potentially, from voting for me. What bothered the doctor was an entry that my campaign staff had posted on my website, an entry that said I would fight, quote, “right-wing ideologues who want to take away a woman’s right to choose,” unquote. The doctor said he had assumed I was a reasonable person, he supported my policy initiatives to help the poor and to lift up our educational system, but that if I truly believed that every pro-life individual was simply an ideologue who wanted to inflict suffering on women, then I was not very reasonable. He wrote, “I do not ask at this point that you oppose abortion, only that you speak about this issue in fair-minded words”—*fair-minded words*.

After I read the doctor’s letter, I wrote back to him, and I thanked him. And I didn’t change my underlying position, but I did tell my staff to change the words on my website. *And I said a prayer that night that I might extend the same presumption of good faith to others that the doctor had extended to me. Because when we do that, when we open up our hearts and our minds to those who may not think precisely like we do or believe precisely what we believe, that’s when we discover at least the possibility of common ground.* That’s when we begin to say, maybe we won’t agree on abortion, but we can still agree that this heart-wrenching decision for any woman is not made casually, that it has both moral and spiritual dimensions.¹²²

A letter from a kindergarten student gave me pause. The student asked, “Are people being nice?” *Are people being nice?* Well, if you turn on the news today or yesterday or a week ago or a month ago, particularly one of the cable channels, you can see why even a kindergartener would ask this question. [*Laughter*] We’ve got politicians calling each other all sorts of unflattering names. Pundits and talking heads shout at each other. The media tends to play up every hint of conflict because it makes for a sexier story, which means anyone interested in getting coverage feels compelled to make their arguments as outrageous and as incendiary as possible.¹²³

Progress cannot happen unless we lower the temperature in this town. When any government measure, no matter how carefully crafted or beneficial, is subject to scorn, when any efforts to help people in need are attacked as un-American, when facts and reason are thrown overboard and only timidity passes for wisdom, and we can no longer even engage in a civil conversation with each other over the things that truly matter, at that point we don’t merely lose our capacity to solve big challenges, we lose something essential about ourselves.¹²⁴

¹²² May 17, 2009.

¹²³ May 1, 2010.

¹²⁴ Jan. 24, 2012; Sept. 9, 2009.

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Trust in Government

We face a deficit of trust, deep and corrosive doubts about how Washington works that have been growing for years. To close that credibility gap, we have to take action on both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue to end the outsized influence of lobbyists, to do our work openly, to give our people the government they deserve. Now, that's what I came to Washington to do. That's why, for the first time in history, my administration posts our White House visitors online. That's why we've excluded lobbyists from policymaking jobs or seats on Federal boards and commissions. But we can't stop there. It's time to require lobbyists to disclose each contact they make on behalf of a client, with my administration, or with Congress. It's time to put strict limits on the contributions that lobbyists give to candidates for Federal office.¹²⁵

Human beings are too often motivated by greed and by power. Each time a CEO rewards himself for failure or a banker puts the rest of us at risk for his own selfish gain, people's doubts grow. Each time lobbyists game the system or politicians tear each other down instead of lifting this country up, we lose faith. The more that TV pundits reduce serious debates to silly arguments, big issues into soundbites, our citizens turn away. No wonder there's so much cynicism out there. No wonder there's so much disappointment.¹²⁶

The corrosive influence of money in politics: big money in politics is a huge problem. We've got to reduce its influence. Special interests and lobbyists have disproportionate access to the corridors of power. With all due deference to separation of powers, the Supreme Court reversed a century of law that I believe will open the floodgates for special interests, including foreign corporations, to spend without limit in our elections. I don't think American elections should be bankrolled by America's most powerful interests, or worse, by foreign entities. They should be decided by the American people. And I'd urge Democrats and Republicans to pass a bill that helps correct some of these problems. Ban insider trading by Members of Congress, limit any elected official from owning stocks in industries they impact, make sure people who bundle campaign contributions for Congress can't lobby Congress and vice versa.¹²⁷

We should insist on the principles of transparency and ethics in public service. – Barack Obama, Jan. 10, 2017

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¹²⁵ Jan. 27, 2010.

¹²⁶ Sept. 20, 2016; Jan. 27, 2010.

¹²⁷ Jan. 10, 2017; May 15, 2016; Jan. 27, 2010; Jan. 24, 2012.

Conclusion

The future we want—all of us want—opportunity and security for our families, a rising standard of living, a sustainable, peaceful planet for our kids—all that is within our reach. But it will only happen if we work together. It will only happen if we can have rational, constructive debates. It will only happen if we fix our politics.

A better politics is one where we spend less time drowning in dark money for ads that pull us into the gutter and spend more time lifting young people up with a sense of purpose and possibility, asking them to join in the great mission of building America.

A better politics doesn't mean we have to agree on everything. This is a big country: different regions, different attitudes, different interests. That's one of our strengths too. Our Founders distributed power between States and branches of government and expected us to argue, just as they did, fiercely, over the size and shape of government, over commerce and foreign relations, over the meaning of liberty and the imperatives of security.

But democracy does require basic bonds of trust between its citizens. It doesn't work if we think the people who disagree with us are all motivated by malice. It doesn't work if we think that our political opponents are unpatriotic or trying to weaken America. Democracy grinds to a halt without a willingness to compromise or when even basic facts are contested or when we listen only to those who agree with us. Our public life withers when only the most extreme voices get all the attention. And most of all, democracy breaks down when the average person feels their voice doesn't matter, that the system is rigged in favor of the rich or the powerful or some special interest.

Too many Americans feel that way right now. There are a whole lot of folks in this Chamber [Congress], good people, who would like to see more cooperation, would like to see a more elevated debate in Washington, but feel trapped by the imperatives of getting elected, by the noise coming out of your base. I know; you've told me. It's the worst kept secret in Washington. And a lot of you aren't enjoying being trapped in that kind of rancor.

But that means if we want a better politics—and I'm addressing the American people now—if we want a better politics, it's not enough just to change a

A better politics is one where we appeal to each other's basic decency instead of our basest fears. A better politics is one where we debate without demonizing each other, where we talk issues and values and principles and facts rather than "gotcha" moments or trivial gaffes or fake controversies that have nothing to do with people's daily lives. – Barack Obama, Jan. 20, 2015

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congressman or change a senator or even change a president. *We have to change the system to reflect our better selves.*

We've got to end the practice of drawing our congressional districts so that politicians can pick their voters and not the other way around. Let a bipartisan group do it.

We've got to reduce the influence of money in our politics so that a handful of families or hidden interests can't bankroll our elections. And if our existing approach to campaign finance reform can't pass muster in the courts, we need to work together to find a real solution. Because it's a problem. And most of you don't like raising money. [Laughter] I know. I've done it.

The corrosive influence of money in politics. – Barack Obama, Jan. 10, 2017

We've got to make it easier to vote, not harder. We need to modernize it for the way we live now. This is America: We want to make it easier for people to participate. But I can't do these things on my own. Changes in our political process—in not just who gets elected, but how they get elected—that will only happen when the American people demand it. It depends on you. That's what's meant by a government of, by, and for the people.

What I'm suggesting is hard. It's a lot easier to be cynical; to accept that change is not possible and politics is hopeless and the problem is all the folks who are elected don't care; and to believe that our voices and our actions don't matter. But *if we give up now, then we forsake a better future.* Those with money and power will gain greater control over the decisions that could send a young soldier to war or allow another economic disaster or roll back the equal rights and voting rights that generations of Americans have fought, even died, to secure. And then, as frustration grows, there will be voices urging us to fall back into our respective tribes, to scapegoat fellow citizens who don't look like us or pray like us or vote like we do or share the same background.

Do what we can to make a difference in the lives of those with whom we share the same brief moment on this Earth.
– Barack Obama, May 17, 2009

We can't afford to go down that path. It won't deliver the economy we want. It will not produce the security we want. But most of all, it contradicts everything that makes us the envy of the world.¹²⁸

No single individual built America on their own. We built it together. We have been and always will be "one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all," a nation with responsibilities to ourselves and with responsibilities to one another. – Barack Obama, Sept. 8, 2011

¹²⁸ Jan. 12, 2016; Jan. 20, 2015.

IV. The Economy, and the Environment

A Stronger U.S. Economy

The U.S. Economy

Every day, we should ask ourselves three questions as a nation: How do we attract more jobs to our shores? How do we equip our people with the skills they need to get those jobs? And how do we make sure that hard work leads to a decent living? A growing economy that creates good, middle-class jobs must be the North Star that guides our efforts.¹²⁹

The true engine of job creation in this country will always be America's businesses. But government can create the conditions necessary for businesses to expand and hire more workers. We should start where most new jobs do, in small businesses, companies that begin when an entrepreneur takes a chance on a dream or a worker decides it's time she became her own boss.¹³⁰

Our free enterprise system is what drives innovation. But because it's not always profitable for companies to invest in basic research, throughout our history, our government has provided cutting-edge scientists and inventors with the support that they need. That's what planted the seeds for the Internet. That's what helped make possible things like computer chips and GPS. Just think of all the good jobs—from manufacturing to retail—that have come from these breakthroughs.¹³¹

Adam Smith's central insight remains true today: There is no greater generator of wealth and innovation than a system of free enterprise that unleashes the full potential of individual men and women. But a free market only thrives when there are rules to ensure competition and fair play. The question before us is not whether the free market is a force for good or ill. Its power to generate wealth and expand freedom is unmatched. But this crisis [the Great Recession] has reminded us that without a watchful eye, the market can spin out of control.

A strong, healthy financial market makes it possible for businesses to access credit and create new jobs. It channels the savings of families into investments that raise incomes. But that can only happen if we guard against the same recklessness that nearly brought down our entire economy.¹³²

¹²⁹ Feb. 12, 2013.

¹³⁰ Jan. 27, 2010.

¹³¹ Jan. 25, 2011.

¹³² May 25, 2011; Jan. 21, 2013; Jan. 20, 2009; Jan. 27, 2010.

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The first time a bipartisan deal to reduce the deficit was passed, a predecessor of mine made the case for a balanced approach by saying this: “Would you rather reduce deficits and interest rates by raising revenue from those who are not now paying their fair share, or would you rather accept larger budget deficits, higher interest rates, and higher unemployment? And I think I know your answer.” Those words were spoken by Ronald Reagan. But today, many Republicans in the House refuse to consider this kind of balanced approach, an approach that was pursued not only by President Reagan, but by the first President Bush, by President Clinton, by myself, and by many Democrats and Republicans in the United States Senate. So we’re left with a stalemate.

Now, what makes today’s stalemate so dangerous is that it has been tied to something known as the debt ceiling. Understand, raising the debt ceiling does not allow Congress to spend more money. It simply gives our country the ability to pay the bills that Congress has already racked up. In the past, raising the debt ceiling was routine. Since the 1950s, Congress has always passed it, and every President has signed it. President Reagan did it 18 times. George W. Bush did it seven times.

And we have to do it by next Tuesday, August 2, [2011], or else we won’t be able to pay all of our bills.

Unfortunately, for the past several weeks, Republican House Members have essentially said that the only way they’ll vote to prevent America’s first-ever default is if the rest of us agree to their deep, spending-cuts-only approach.

If that happens and we default, we would not have enough money to pay all of our bills, bills that include monthly Social Security checks, veterans’ benefits, and the government contracts we’ve signed with thousands of businesses. For the first time in history, our country’s AAA credit rating would be downgraded, leaving investors around the world to wonder whether the United States is still a good bet. Interest rates would skyrocket on credit cards, on mortgages, and on car loans, which amounts to a huge tax hike on the American people. We would risk sparking a deep economic crisis, this one caused almost entirely by Washington.

But there’s an even greater danger to this approach. Based on what we’ve seen these past few weeks, we know what to expect six months from now. The House of Representatives will once again refuse to prevent default unless the rest of us accept their cuts-only approach. Again they will refuse to ask the wealthiest Americans to give up their tax cuts or deductions. Again they will demand harsh cuts to programs like Medicare. And once again the economy will be held captive unless they get their way. *This is no way to run the greatest country on Earth.*¹³³

The greatest blow to our confidence in our economy [in 2011] didn’t come from events beyond our control. It came from a debate in Washington over whether the United States would pay its bills or not. Who benefitted from that fiasco? – Barack Obama, Jan. 24, 2012

¹³³ July 25, 2011.

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Economic Freedom and Regulation, and the Great Recession

The economy remains in the midst of a historic recession, the worst we've seen since the Great Depression; the result, in part, of greed and irresponsibility that rippled out from Wall Street and Washington, as we spent beyond our means and failed to make hard choices.

Let's remember how we got here. Long before the recession, jobs and manufacturing began leaving our shores. Technology made businesses more efficient, but also made some jobs obsolete. Folks at the top saw their incomes rise like never before, but most hard-working Americans struggled with costs that were growing, paychecks that weren't, and personal debt that kept piling up.

In 2008, the house of cards collapsed. We learned that mortgages had been sold to people who couldn't afford or understand them. Banks had made huge bets and bonuses with other people's money. Regulators had looked the other way or didn't have the authority to stop the bad behavior.

It was wrong, it was irresponsible, and it plunged our economy into a crisis that put millions out of work, saddled us with more debt, and left innocent, hard-working Americans holding the bag. In the 6 months before I took office, we lost nearly 4 million jobs. And we lost another 4 million before our policies were in full effect.

Those are the facts. But so are these: In the last 22 months, businesses have created more than 3 million jobs. Last year, they created the most jobs since 2005. American manufacturers are hiring again, creating jobs for the first time since the late 1990s. Together, we've agreed to cut the deficit by more than \$2 trillion. And we've put in place new rules to hold Wall Street accountable so a crisis like this never happens again.¹³⁴

We need smart regulations to prevent irresponsible behavior. Rules to prevent financial fraud or toxic dumping or faulty medical devices, these don't destroy the free market. They make the free market work better. If you are a big bank or financial institution, you're no longer allowed to make risky bets with your customers' deposits. You're required to write out a "living will" that details exactly how you'll pay the bills if you fail, because the rest of us are not bailing you out ever again. And if you're a mortgage lender or a payday lender or a credit card company, the days of signing people up for products they can't afford with confusing forms and deceptive practices, those days are over. Today, American consumers finally have a watchdog in [Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Director] Richard Cordray, with one job: to look out for them.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ May 13, 2009; Jan. 24, 2012.

¹³⁵ Jan. 24, 2012.

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Economic Opportunity and Fairness

Will we accept an economy where only a few of us do spectacularly well? Or will we commit ourselves to an economy that generates rising incomes and chances for everyone who makes the effort? *The Nation cannot prosper long when it favors only the prosperous.* We can either settle for a country where a shrinking number of people do really well while a growing number of Americans barely get by, or we can restore an economy where everyone gets a fair shot and everyone does their fair share and everyone plays by the same set of rules. Millions of Americans who work hard and play by the rules every day deserve a government and a financial system that do the same. It's time to apply the same rules from top to bottom. No bailouts, no handouts, and no copouts. An America built to last insists on responsibility from everybody.¹³⁶

The Nation cannot prosper long when it favors only the prosperous. Our democracy won't work without a sense that everyone has economic opportunity. – Barack Obama, Jan. 20, 2009; Jan. 10, 2017

We don't begrudge financial success in this country. We admire it. When Americans talk about folks like me paying my fair share of taxes, it's not because they envy the rich. It's because they understand that when I get a tax break I don't need and the country can't afford, it either adds to the deficit or somebody else has to make up the difference, like a senior on a fixed income or a student trying to get through school or a family trying to make ends meet. That's not right. Americans know that's not right. They know that this generation's success is only possible because past generations felt a responsibility to each other and to the future of their country, and they know our way of life will only endure if we feel that same sense of shared responsibility.¹³⁷

It's sure not the average family that avoids paying taxes through offshore accounts. – Barack Obama, Jan. 12, 2016

In the wealthiest nation on Earth, no one who works full-time should have to live in poverty. – Barack Obama, Feb. 12, 2013

Today, women make up about half our workforce, but they still make 77 cents for every dollar a man earns. That is wrong, and it's an embarrassment. Women deserve equal pay for equal work. She deserves to have a baby without sacrificing her job. A mother deserves a day off to care for a sick child or a sick parent without running into hardship. And you know what, a father does too. It is time to do away with workplace policies that belong in a "Mad Men" episode. [Laughter] Let's all come together—Congress, the White House, businesses from Wall Street

¹³⁶ Jan. 20, 2015; Jan. 20, 2009; Jan. 24, 2012.

¹³⁷ Jan. 24, 2012.

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to Main Street—to give every woman the opportunity she deserves. *When women succeed, America succeeds.*¹³⁸

Over much of the last century, we've unleashed the strongest economic engine the world has ever seen, but over the past few decades, our economy has become more and more unequal. The top 10 percent of earners now take in half of all income in the U.S. In the past, it used to be a top CEO made 20 or 30 times the income of the average worker. Today, it's 300 times more. And wages aren't rising fast enough for millions of hard-working families. *Stark inequality is corrosive to our democratic idea.* While the top 1 percent has amassed a bigger share of wealth and income, too many of our families in inner cities and in rural counties have been left behind—the laid-off factory worker, the waitress or healthcare worker who's just barely getting by and struggling to pay the bills—convinced that the game is fixed against them, that their government only serves the interests of the powerful. That's a recipe for more cynicism and polarization in our politics.¹³⁹

Profitable corporations like Costco see higher wages as the smart way to boost productivity and reduce turnover.
– Barack Obama, Jan. 28, 2014

Today in 2014, the Federal minimum wage is worth about 20 percent less than it was when Ronald Reagan first stood here. Give America a raise.
– Barack Obama, Jan. 28, 2014

A lot of the areas where it has been difficult to find agreement over the last seven years fall under the category of what role the government should play in making sure the system's not rigged in favor of the wealthiest and biggest corporations. But after years now of record corporate profits, working families won't get more opportunity or bigger paychecks just by letting big banks or big oil or hedge funds make their own rules at everybody else's expense. *It's sure not the average family watching tonight that avoids paying taxes through offshore accounts.* [Laughter]

Because of loopholes and shelters in the Tax Code, a quarter of all millionaires pay lower tax rates than millions of middle-class households. Right now Warren Buffett pays a lower tax rate than his secretary. Do we want to keep these tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans? Or do we want to keep our investments in everything else, like education and medical research, a strong military and care for our veterans? Because if we're serious about paying down our debt, we can't do both. Tax reform should follow the Buffett rule. If you make more than a million dollars a year, you should not pay less than 30 percent in taxes. Now, you can call this class warfare all you want. But asking a billionaire to pay at least as much as his secretary in taxes? Most Americans would call that common sense.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Jan. 28, 2014.

¹³⁹ May 15, 2016; Jan. 10, 2017.

¹⁴⁰ Jan. 12, 2016; Jan. 24, 2012.

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Innovation, and Education

Real prosperity, prosperity that fosters innovation and prosperity that endures, comes from unleashing our greatest economic resource, and that's the entrepreneurial spirit, the talents of our people. Many of our best corporate citizens are also our most creative.

An economy built to last is one where we encourage the talent and ingenuity of every person in this country. Innovation is what America has always been about. Most new jobs are created in startups and small businesses. So let's pass an agenda that helps them succeed. Tear down regulations that prevent aspiring entrepreneurs from getting the financing to grow. Expand tax relief to small businesses that are raising wages and creating good jobs. Both parties agree on these ideas.

The currency of today's economy is knowledge.
– Barack Obama, Nov. 4, 2009

Innovation also demands basic research. Today, the discoveries taking place in our federally financed labs and universities could lead to new treatments that kill cancer cells but leave healthy ones untouched, new lightweight vests for cops and soldiers that can stop any bullet. Don't gut these investments in our budget. Don't let other countries win the race for the future. Support the same kind of research and innovation that led to the computer chip and the Internet, to new American jobs and new American industries.

Let's make sure that what we're cutting in the budget is really excess weight. Cutting the deficit by gutting our investments in innovation and education is like lightening an overloaded airplane by removing its engine. It may make you feel like you're flying high at first, but it won't take long before you feel the impact.
– Barack Obama, Jan. 25, 2011

If we want to make the best products, we have to invest in the best ideas. Every dollar we invested to map the human genome returned \$140 to our economy—every dollar. Now is not the time to gut job-creating investments in science and innovation, now is the time to reach a level of research and development not seen since the height of the space race. We need to make those investments.¹⁴¹

Half a century ago, when the Soviets beat us into space with the launch of a satellite called Sputnik, we had no idea how we would beat them to the Moon. The science wasn't even there yet. NASA didn't exist. But after investing in better research and education, we didn't just surpass the Soviets, we unleashed a wave of innovation that created new industries and millions of new jobs. We didn't argue about the science or shrink our research and development budget. We built a space program almost overnight. And 12 years later, we were walking on the Moon. That spirit of discovery is in our DNA.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Nov. 17, 2011; Jan. 12, 2016; Jan. 24, 2012; Feb. 12, 2013.

¹⁴² Jan. 25, 2011; Jan. 12, 2016.

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The first step in winning the future is encouraging American innovation. None of us can predict with certainty what the next big industry will be or where the new jobs will come from. Thirty years ago, we couldn't know that something called the Internet would lead to an economic revolution. What we can do—what America does better than anyone else—is spark the creativity and imagination of our people. In America, innovation doesn't just change our lives. It is how we make our living.

*The answers to our problems don't lie beyond our reach. They exist in our laboratories and our universities, in our fields and our factories, in the imaginations of our entrepreneurs and the pride of the hardest-working people on Earth. Those qualities that have made America the greatest force of progress and prosperity in human history, we still possess in ample measure. What is required now is for this country to pull together, confront boldly the challenges we face, and take responsibility for our future once more.*¹⁴³

Right now, three-quarters of the fastest growing occupations require more than a high school diploma. And yet, just over half of our citizens have that level of education. We have one of the highest high school dropout rates of any industrialized nation, and half of the students who begin college never finish. This is a prescription for economic decline, because we know the countries that outteach us today will outcompete us tomorrow.¹⁴⁴

More and more, America's economic preeminence, our ability to outcompete other countries, will be shaped not just in our boardrooms, not just on our factory floors, but in our classrooms and our schools, and at universities. It will be determined by how well all of us, and especially parents, educate our sons and daughters. – Barack Obama, May 9, 2010

In a single generation, revolutions in technology have transformed the way we live, work, and do business. Steel mills that once needed 1,000 workers can now do the same work with 100. Today, just about any company can set up shop, hire workers, and sell their products wherever there's an Internet connection. For all the naysayers predicting our decline, America still has the largest, most prosperous economy in the world. No workers are more productive than ours. No country has more successful companies or grants more patents to inventors and entrepreneurs. We're the home to the world's best colleges and universities, where more students come to study than any place on Earth.¹⁴⁵

Our students don't just memorize equations, but answer questions like: "What do you think of that idea? What would you change about the world? What do you want to be when you grow up?" – Barack Obama, Jan. 25, 2011

¹⁴³ Jan. 25, 2011; Feb. 24, 2009.

¹⁴⁴ Feb. 24, 2009.

¹⁴⁵ Jan. 25, 2011.

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Infrastructure

An important step in winning the future is rebuilding America. To attract new businesses to our shores, we need the fastest, most reliable ways to move people, goods, and information, from high-speed rail to high-speed Internet.

So much of America needs to be rebuilt. We've got crumbling roads and bridges, a power grid that wastes too much energy, an incomplete high-speed broadband network that prevents a small-business owner in rural America from selling her products all over the world.

During the Great Depression, America built the Hoover Dam and the Golden Gate Bridge. After World War II, we connected our States with a system of highways. Democratic and Republican administrations invested in great projects that benefited everybody, from the workers who built them to the businesses that still use them today.

Government investments [in infrastructure and education] led to a nation of highways, an American on the Moon, and an explosion of technology that still shapes our world. In each case, government didn't supplant private enterprise; it catalyzed private enterprise. It created the conditions for thousands of entrepreneurs and new businesses to adapt and to thrive.¹⁴⁶

Initiatives in manufacturing, energy, infrastructure, housing, all these things will help entrepreneurs and small-business owners expand and create new jobs. But none of it will matter unless we also equip our citizens with the skills and training to fill those jobs. And that has to start at the earliest possible age. *We must invest in America's greatest resource: our people.*¹⁴⁷

There are values at stake in the choices before us. Our budget is a vision for America, a blueprint for our future. – Barack Obama, Jan. 20, 2015; Feb. 24, 2009

America: the greatest force of progress and prosperity in human history. – Barack Obama, Feb. 24, 2009

We all remember Abraham Lincoln as the leader who saved our Union, founder of the Republican Party. But in the middle of a Civil War, he was also a leader who looked to the future; a Republican President who mobilized Government to build the transcontinental railroad, launch the National Academy of Sciences, set up the first land-grant colleges. And leaders of both parties have followed the example he set. Ask yourselves: Where would we be right now if the people who sat here before us [in Congress] had decided not to build our highways, not to build our bridges, our dams, our airports? – Barack Obama, Sept. 8, 2011

¹⁴⁶ Jan. 25, 2011; Jan. 24, 2012; Feb. 24, 2009.

¹⁴⁷ Feb. 12, 2013; June 22, 2011.

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Immigration

For more than 200 years, our tradition of welcoming immigrants from around the world has given us a tremendous advantage over other nations. It's kept us youthful, dynamic, and entrepreneurial. It has shaped our character as a people with limitless possibilities, people not trapped by our past, but able to remake ourselves as we choose.

Our history is as a nation of immigrants, and we must continue to welcome people from around the world. Our economy is stronger when we harness the talents and ingenuity of striving, hopeful immigrants.

The stereotypes about immigrants today were said, almost word for word, about the Irish and Italians and Poles, who it was said were going to destroy the fundamental character of America. And as it turned out, America wasn't weakened by the presence of these newcomers; these newcomers embraced this Nation's creed, and this Nation was strengthened.

Building walls won't boost our economy, and it won't enhance our security either. – Barack Obama, May 15, 2016

Suggesting that we can build an endless wall along our borders and blame our challenges on immigrants, that doesn't just run counter to our history as the world's melting pot, it contradicts the evidence that our growth and our innovation and our dynamism has always been spurred by our ability to attract strivers from every corner of the globe.¹⁴⁸

Scripture tells us that we shall not oppress a stranger, for we know the heart of a stranger; we were strangers once too. My fellow Americans, we are and always will be a nation of immigrants. *We were strangers once too.* And whether our forebears were strangers who crossed the Atlantic or the Pacific or the Rio Grande, we are here only because this country welcomed them in and taught them that to be an American is about something more than what we look like or what our last names are or how we worship. What makes us Americans is our shared commitment to an ideal: that all of us are created equal and all of us have the chance to make of our lives what we will. That's the country our parents and grandparents and generations before them built for us. That's the tradition we must uphold. That's the legacy we must leave for those who are yet to come.¹⁴⁹

We didn't raise the Statue of Liberty with its back to the world, we raised it with its light to the world. – Barack Obama, April 29, 2011

¹⁴⁸ Nov. 20, 2014; June 29, 2016; Feb. 12, 2013; Jan. 10, 2017; May 15, 2016.

¹⁴⁹ Nov. 20, 2014.

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Health

The wealth of a nation also depends on the health of its people. I want the country that eliminated polio and mapped the human genome to lead a new era of medicine, one that delivers the right treatment at the right time.¹⁵⁰

I didn't choose to tackle the issue of healthcare to get some legislative victory under my belt. And by now it should be fairly obvious that I didn't take on healthcare because it was good politics. [Laughter] I took on healthcare because of the stories I've heard from Americans with preexisting conditions whose lives depend on getting coverage, patients who've been denied coverage, families, even those with insurance, who are just one illness away from financial ruin. After nearly a century of trying—Democratic administrations, Republican administrations—we are closer than ever to bringing more security to the lives of so many Americans. The approach we've taken would protect every American from the worst practices of the insurance industry. It would give small businesses and uninsured Americans a chance to choose an affordable healthcare plan in a competitive market. It would require every insurance plan to cover preventive care.¹⁵¹

Preventive care is one of the best ways to keep our people healthy and our costs under control. – Barack Obama, Feb. 24, 2009

Michelle's "Let's Move!" partnership with schools, businesses, local leaders has helped bring down childhood obesity rates for the first time in 30 years. And that's an achievement that will improve lives and reduce healthcare costs for decades to come. – Barack Obama, Jan. 28, 2014

Health insurance reform is all about the peace of mind that if misfortune strikes, you don't have to lose everything. Already, because of the Affordable Care Act, more than 3 million Americans under age 26 have gained coverage under their parent's plan. More than 9 million Americans have signed up for private health insurance or Medicaid coverage. Nine million.

And here's another number: zero. Because of this law, no American—none, zero—can ever again be dropped or denied coverage for a preexisting condition like asthma or back pain or cancer. No woman can ever be charged more just because she's a woman. And we did all this while adding years to Medicare's finances, keeping Medicare premiums flat, and lowering prescription costs for millions of seniors. Now, I do not expect to convince my Republican friends on the merits of this law. But I know that the American people are not interested in refighting old battles. So again, if you have specific plans to cut costs, cover more people, increase choice, tell America what you'd do differently. Let's see if the

¹⁵⁰ Nov. 8, 2010; Jan. 20, 2015.

¹⁵¹ Jan. 27, 2010.

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numbers add up. But let's not have another 40-something votes to repeal a law that's already helping millions of Americans. The first 40 were plenty.¹⁵²

The biggest driver of our long-term debt is the rising cost of healthcare for an aging population. And those of us who care deeply about programs like Medicare must embrace the need for modest reforms; otherwise, our retirement programs will crowd out the investments we need for our children and jeopardize the promise of a secure retirement for future generations. But we can't ask senior citizens and working families to shoulder the entire burden of deficit reduction while asking nothing more from the wealthiest and the most powerful. We won't grow the middle-class simply by shifting the cost of healthcare or college onto families that are already struggling or by forcing communities to lay off more teachers and more cops and more firefighters. Most Americans—Democrats, Republicans, and Independents—understand that we can't just cut our way to prosperity. They know that broad-based economic growth requires a balanced approach to deficit reduction, with spending cuts and revenue and with everybody doing their fair share.¹⁵³

With Ebola, instead of responding with fear, we responded with facts and responded with science and organization. And thanks to a coordinated global response, enabled by the American military and our medical workers who got in there first, we stopped the spread of Ebola in West Africa and saved countless lives and protected ourselves. But we need a broader effort to stop a disease that could kill hundreds of thousands, inflict horrific suffering, destabilize economies, and move rapidly across borders. It's easy to see this as a distant problem until it is not.

When disease goes unchecked in any corner of the world, we know that it can spread across oceans and continents. We can't combat a disease like Zika that recognizes no borders—mosquitos don't respect walls—[laughter]—unless we make permanent the same urgency that we brought to bear against Ebola: by strengthening our own systems of public health, by investing in cures and rolling back the root causes of disease, and helping poorer countries develop a public health infrastructure.¹⁵⁴

For the loved ones we've all lost, for the families that we can still save, let's make America the country that cures cancer once and for all. Let's make it happen. – Barack Obama, Jan. 12, 2016

¹⁵² Jan. 28, 2014.

¹⁵³ Feb. 12, 2013.

¹⁵⁴ June 2, 2016; Sept. 24, 2014; July 11, 2009; Sept. 20, 2016.

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Energy

No area holds more promise than our investments in American energy. After years of talking about it, we're finally poised to control our own energy future. We produce more oil at home than we have in 15 years. We have doubled the distance our cars will go on a gallon of gas and the amount of renewable energy we generate from sources like wind and solar, with tens of thousands of good American jobs to show for it. We produce more natural gas than ever before, and nearly everyone's energy bill is lower because of it. And over the last four years, our emissions of the dangerous carbon pollution that threatens our planet have actually fallen.¹⁵⁵

The easiest way to save money is to waste less energy. So here's a proposal: Help manufacturers eliminate energy waste in their factories and give businesses incentives to upgrade their buildings. Their energy bills will be a hundred billion dollars lower over the next decade, and America will have less pollution, more manufacturing, more jobs for construction workers who need them. Send me a bill that creates these jobs.¹⁵⁶

For too long, we've heard that confronting climate change means destroying our own economies. But let me just say, carbon emissions in the United States are back to where they were two decades ago, even as we've grown our economy dramatically over the same period.¹⁵⁷

The country that harnesses the power of clean, renewable energy will lead the 21st century. Even if the planet wasn't at stake, even if 2014 wasn't the warmest year on record—until 2015 turned out to be even hotter—why would we want to pass up the chance for American businesses to produce and sell the energy of the future?¹⁵⁸

Each day brings further evidence that the ways we use energy strengthen our adversaries and threaten our planet. But in just eight years, we've halved our dependence on foreign oil, we've doubled our renewable energy, we've led the world to an agreement that has the promise to save this planet. – Barack Obama, Jan. 20, 2009; Jan. 10, 2017

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¹⁵⁵ Feb. 12, 2013.

¹⁵⁶ Jan. 24, 2012.

¹⁵⁷ June 29, 2016.

¹⁵⁸ Feb. 24, 2009; Jan. 12, 2016.

A Stronger Global Economy

The Global Economy

The greatest force the world has ever known for creating wealth and opportunity is free markets. So we seek economies that are open and transparent. We seek trade that is free and fair. And we seek an open international economic system, where rules are clear and every nation plays by them. If we want to close loopholes that allow large corporations and wealthy individuals to avoid paying their fair share of taxes, we've got to have the cooperation of other countries in a global financial system to help enforce financial laws.¹⁵⁹

We need growth that is fair, where every nation plays by the rules, where workers' rights are respected and our businesses can compete on a level playing field, where the intellectual property and new technologies that fuel innovation are protected, and where currencies are market driven so no nation has an unfair advantage.

We also need growth that is broad, not just for the few, but for the many, with reforms that protect consumers from abuse and a global commitment to end the corruption that stifles growth.

And we need growth that is sustainable. This includes the clean energy that creates green jobs and combats climate change, which cannot be denied. We see it in the stronger fires, the devastating floods, and the Pacific islands confronting rising seas.

As we grow our economies, we also need to remember the link between growth and good governance: the rule of law, transparent institutions, the equal administration of justice. Because history shows that over the long run democracy and economic growth go hand in hand. And *prosperity without freedom is just another form of poverty*. Our goal is simple: a global economy in which growth is sustained and opportunity is available to all.¹⁶⁰

Economies based on free and open markets perform better and become markets for our goods.
– Barack Obama, May 28, 2014

We now live in a world where technology has made it possible for companies to take their business anywhere. If we want them to start here and stay here and hire here, we have to be able to outbuild and outeducate and outinnovate every other country on Earth.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Nov. 17, 2011; May 15, 2016.

¹⁶⁰ Nov. 17, 2011; Sept. 23, 2009.

¹⁶¹ Sept. 8, 2011.

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Trade and the Global Economy

We live in an age of global supply chains and cargo ships that crisscross oceans and online commerce that can render borders obsolete. And a lot of folks have legitimate concerns with the way globalization has progressed. That's one of the changes that's been taking place: jobs shipped overseas, trade deals that sometimes put workers and businesses at a disadvantage. But the answer isn't to stop trading with other countries. In this global economy, that's not even possible. The answer is to do trade the right way, by negotiating with other countries so that they raise their labor standards and their environmental standards; and we make sure they don't impose unfair tariffs on American goods or steal American intellectual property. That's how we make sure that international rules are consistent with our values, including human rights. And ultimately, that's how we help raise wages here in America. That's how we help our workers compete on a level playing field.¹⁶²

Restricting trade or giving in to protectionism in this 21st-century economy will not work. It will not work. Even if we wanted to, we can't seal ourselves off from the rest of the world. Very few of our domestic industries can sever what is now truly a global supply chain. And so for those of us who truly believe that our economies have to work for everybody, the answer is not to try and pull back from our interconnected world; it is rather to engage with the rest of the world, to shape the rules so they're good for our workers and good for our businesses.

We forged a Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) to open markets and protect workers and the environment and advance American leadership in Asia. It cuts 18,000 taxes on products made in America, which will then support more good jobs here in America. With TPP, China does not set the rules in that region, we do. You want to show our strength in this new century? Approve this agreement. Give us the tools to enforce it. It's the right thing to do.¹⁶³

We have to seek new markets aggressively, just as our competitors are. If America sits on the sidelines while other nations sign trade deals, we will lose the chance to create jobs on our shores. But realizing those benefits also means enforcing those agreements so our trading partners play by the rules.

I will go anywhere in the world to open new markets for American products. And I will not stand by when our competitors don't play by the rules. We've brought trade cases against China at nearly twice the rate as the last administration, and it's made a difference. Over a thousand Americans are working today because we stopped a surge in Chinese tires. But we need to do more. It's not right when another country lets our movies, music, and software be pirated. It's not fair when foreign manufacturers have a leg up on ours only

¹⁶² May 15, 2016.

¹⁶³ June 29, 2016; Jan. 12, 2016.

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because they're heavily subsidized. Our workers are the most productive on Earth, and if the playing field is level, I promise you, America will always win.¹⁶⁴

The integration of our global economy has made life better for billions of men, women, and children. Over the last 25 years, the number of people living in extreme poverty has been cut from nearly 40 percent of humanity to under 10 percent. That's unprecedented.

The world is more prosperous than ever before, but alongside globalization and technological wonders, we also see a rise in inequality and wage stagnation across the advanced economies, leaving too many workers and communities fearful of diminishing prospects, not just for themselves, but more importantly, for their children.

And in the face of such rising uncertainty, it is not enough to look at aggregate growth rates or stock prices or the pace of digital innovation. If the benefits of globalization accrue only to those at the very top, if our democracies seem incapable of assuring broad-based growth and opportunity for everyone, then people will push back, out of anger or out of fear. And politicians—some sincere and some entirely cynical—will tap that anger and fear, harkening back to bygone days of order and predictability and national glory, arguing that we must rebuild walls and disengage from a chaotic world or rid ourselves of the supposed ills brought on by immigrants, all in order to regain control of our lives.

In times of economic unease, there can also be an anxiety about human rights. But we will not give up our ideals for expedience's sake. And prosperity without freedom is just another form of poverty.
– Barack Obama, Sept. 23, 2010; Jan. 20, 2009; Nov. 17, 2011

Long-term trends of inequality and dislocation and the resulting social division can't be ignored. How we respond to the forces of globalization and technological

A world in which 1 percent of humanity controls as much wealth as the other 99 percent will never be stable. – Barack Obama, Sept. 20, 2016

change will determine the durability of an international order that ensures security and prosperity for future generations.¹⁶⁵

Too often, those trumpeting the benefits of globalization have ignored inequality within and among nations; have ignored the enduring appeal of ethnic and sectarian identities; have left international institutions ill-equipped, underfunded, and underresourced to handle transnational challenges. And as these real problems have been neglected, alternative visions of the world have pressed forward both in the wealthiest countries and in the poorest: religious fundamentalism, the politics of ethnicity or tribe or sect, aggressive nationalism, a

¹⁶⁴ Jan. 27, 2010; Jan. 24, 2012.

¹⁶⁵ Sept. 20, 2016; June 29, 2016.

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crude populism—sometimes from the far left, but more often from the far right—which seeks to restore what they believe was a better, simpler age, free of outside contamination.

We cannot dismiss these visions. They are powerful. They reflect dissatisfaction among too many of our citizens. I do not believe those visions can deliver security or prosperity over the long term, but I do believe that these visions fail to recognize, at a very basic level, our common humanity. Moreover, I believe that the acceleration of travel and technology and telecommunications, together with a global economy that depends on global supply chains, makes it self-defeating ultimately for those who seek to reverse this progress. Today, a nation ringed by walls would only imprison itself.

We are all God's children. We all share common aspirations to live in peace and security, to access education and opportunity, to love our families and our communities and our faith. That is our common humanity. – Barack Obama, July 11, 2009

A world in which 1 percent of humanity controls as much wealth as the other 99 percent will never be stable. I understand that the gaps between rich and poor are not new, but just as the child in a slum today can see the skyscraper nearby, technology now allows any person with a smartphone to see how the most privileged among us live and the contrast between their own lives and others. Expectations rise, then, faster than governments can deliver, and a pervasive sense of injustice undermines people's faith in the system.

So how do we fix this imbalance? We cannot unwind integration any more than we can stuff technology back into a box. Nor can we look to failed models of the past. If we start resorting to trade wars, market-distorting subsidies, beggar-thy-neighbor policies, an overreliance on natural resources instead of innovation, these approaches will make us poorer, collectively, and they are more likely to lead to conflict. And the stark contrast between, say, the success of the Republic of Korea and the wasteland of North Korea shows that central, planned control of the economy is a dead end.

But I do believe there's another path, one that fuels growth and innovation and offers the clearest route to individual opportunity and national success. It does not require succumbing to a soulless capitalism that benefits only the few, but rather recognizes that economies are more successful when we close the gap between rich and poor, and growth is broadly based. And that means respecting the rights of workers so they can organize into independent unions and earn a living wage. It means investing in our people: their skills, their education, their capacity to take an idea and turn it into a business. It means strengthening the safety net that protects our people from hardship and allows them to take more risks, to look for a new job or start a new venture.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Sept. 20, 2016.

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Development/Foreign Aid

The purpose of foreign assistance must be creating the conditions where it's no longer needed. The point is, to help ourselves, we've got to help others, not pull up the drawbridge and try to keep the world out. We share a common interest in development that advances dignity and security. To succeed, we must cast aside the impulse to look at impoverished parts of the globe as a place for charity. Instead, we should empower the same forces that have allowed our own people to thrive; we should help the hungry to feed themselves, the doctors who care for the sick. We should support countries that confront corruption and allow their people to innovate. And we should advance the truth that nations prosper when they allow women and girls to reach their full potential.

Development is not charity, it's an investment in our future prosperity. Wealthy countries like ours cannot reach our full potential while others remain mired in poverty. Progress in the most impoverished parts of our world enriches us all, not only because it creates new markets, more stable order in certain regions of the world, but also because it's the right thing to do.¹⁶⁷

Development depends on good governance. That is the ingredient which has been missing in far too many places for far too long. That's the change that can unlock potential. And that is a responsibility that can only be met by the people of countries. But the true sign of success is not whether we are a source of perpetual aid that helps people scrape by; it's whether we are partners in building the capacity for transformational change.

History shows that over the long run democracy and economic growth go hand in hand. – Barack Obama, Nov. 17, 2011

Far too many people in far too many places live through the daily crises that challenge our humanity: the despair of an empty stomach, the thirst brought on by dwindling water supplies, the injustice of a child dying from a treatable disease or a mother losing her life as she gives birth. The United States has made it a focus of our engagement abroad to help people to feed themselves.¹⁶⁸

We extend a hand to those devastated by disaster, as we did in the Philippines, when our Marines and civilians rushed to aid those battered by a typhoon, and who were greeted with words like, "We will never forget your kindness" and "God bless America." We do these things because they help promote our long-term security, and we do them because we believe in the inherent dignity and equality of every human being.¹⁶⁹

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¹⁶⁷ July 11, 2009; May 15, 2016; May 25, 2011; June 29, 2016; Feb. 12, 2013.

¹⁶⁸ July 11, 2009; Sept. 23, 2009; Sept. 21, 2011.

¹⁶⁹ Jan. 28, 2014.

The Environment

In the 21st century, there will be no peace unless we take responsibility for the preservation of our planet. The danger posed by climate change cannot be denied. Our responsibility to meet it must not be deferred. If we continue down our current course, every member of this U.N. Assembly will see irreversible changes within their borders. Our efforts to end conflicts will be eclipsed by wars over refugees and resources. Development will be devastated by drought and famine. Land that human beings have lived on for millennia will disappear. *Future generations will look back and wonder why we refused to act, why we failed to pass on an environment that was worthy of our inheritance.*¹⁷⁰

Our planet—commanded to our care by God. – Barack Obama, Jan. 21, 2013

We know what we see with our own eyes. Out west, firefighters brave longer, harsher wildfire seasons; States have to budget for that. Mountain towns worry about what smaller snowpacks mean for tourism. Farmers and families at the bottom worry about what it will mean for their water. In cities like Norfolk and Miami, streets now flood frequently at high tide. Shrinking icecaps have *National Geographic* making the biggest change in its atlas since the Soviet Union broke apart. So the question is not whether we need to act. The overwhelming judgment of science, accumulated and measured and reviewed over decades, has put that question to rest. The question is whether we have the will to act before it's too late. For if we fail to protect the world we leave not just to my children, but to your children and your children's children, we will fail one of our primary reasons for being on this world in the first place. And that is to leave the world a little bit better for the next generation.¹⁷¹

The best scientists in the world are all telling us that our activities are changing the climate, and if we don't act forcefully, we'll continue to see rising oceans; longer, hotter heat waves; dangerous droughts and floods; and massive disruptions that can trigger greater migration and conflict and hunger around the globe. The Pentagon says that climate change poses immediate risks to our national security. We should act like it.¹⁷²

The Pentagon calls climate change a "threat multiplier." Denying climate change or refusing to deal with it is a dereliction of duty and endangers our national security. – Barack Obama, May 20, 2015

¹⁷⁰ Sept. 23, 2009.

¹⁷¹ June 14, 2014.

¹⁷² Jan. 20, 2015.

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Each day brings further evidence that the ways we use energy strengthen our adversaries and threaten our planet. Part of the challenge is that the media doesn't spend a lot of time covering climate change and letting average Americans *know how it could impact their futures.* Now, the broadcast networks' nightly newscasts spend just a few minutes a month covering climate issues. On cable, the debate is usually between political pundits, not scientists. When we introduced those new antipollution standards a couple weeks ago, the instant reaction from Washington's political press wasn't about what it would mean for our planet; it was what would it mean for an election six months from now. And that kind of misses the point.

The climate change deniers suggest there's still a debate over the science. There is not. The talking heads on cable news suggest public opinion is hopelessly deadlocked. It is not. Seven in ten Americans say global warming is a serious problem. Seven in ten say the Federal government should limit pollution from our power plants. And of all the issues in a recent poll asking Americans where we think we can make a difference, protecting the environment came out on top.

When our leaders express a disdain for facts, when they're not held accountable for repeating falsehoods and just making stuff up, while actual experts are dismissed as elitists, then we've got a problem. You know, it's interesting that if we get sick, we actually want to make sure the doctor has, like, gone to medical school. – Barack Obama, May 15, 2016

Developing countries are using more and more energy, and tens of millions of people are entering the global middle class, and they want to buy cars and refrigerators, so if we don't deal with this problem soon, we're going to be overwhelmed. These nations have some of the fastest-rising levels of carbon pollution. They're going to have to take action to meet this challenge. They're more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than we are. They've got even more to lose. But they're waiting to see what does America do. That's what the world does. It waits to watch us act. And when we do, they move. And I'm convinced that on this issue, when America proves what's possible, then they're going to join us.

And America cannot meet this threat alone. Of course, the world cannot meet it without America. This is a fight that America must lead. So I'm going to keep doing my part for as long as I hold this office and as long as I'm a citizen once out of office. But we're going to need you, the next generation, to finish the job.

It's no accident that when President Kennedy needed to convince the Nation that sending Americans into space was a worthy goal, he went to a university. That's where he started. Because a challenge as big as that, as costly as that, as difficult as that, requires a spirit of youth. It requires a spirit of adventure, a willingness to take risks. It requires optimism. It requires hope. That day, a man told us we'd go to the Moon within a decade. And despite all the naysayers, somehow, we knew as a nation that we'd build a spaceship and we'd meet that

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goal. That's because we're Americans, and that's what we do. Even when our political system is consumed by small things, we are a people called to do big things. And progress on climate change is a big thing. Progress won't always be flashy; it will be measured in disasters averted and lives saved and a planet preserved and days just like this one, 20 years from now and 50 years from now and 100 years from now. But can you imagine a more worthy goal, a more worthy legacy, than protecting the world we leave to our children?¹⁷³

The science is indisputable. The fossil fuels we burn release carbon dioxide, which traps heat. And the levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere are now higher than they have been in 800,000 years. The planet is getting warmer. Fourteen of the 15 hottest years on record have been in the past 15 years. Last year was the planet's warmest year ever recorded.

Our scientists at NASA just reported that some of the sea ice around Antarctica is breaking up even faster than expected. The world's glaciers are melting, pouring new water into the ocean. Over the past century, the world sea level rose by about 8 inches. Now, that was in the last century; by the end of this century, it's projected to rise another 1 to 4 feet.

Climate change means Arctic sea ice is vanishing faster than ever. In Alaska, we have more than 1,000 miles of Arctic coastline. The United States is an Arctic nation, and we have a great interest in making sure that the region is peaceful, that its indigenous people and environment are protected, and that its resources are managed responsibly in partnership with other nations.

In New York Harbor, the sea level is already a foot higher than a century ago, which was one of the reasons Superstorm Sandy put so much of lower Manhattan underwater. During Sandy, the Coast Guard mounted a heroic response, along with our National Guard and Reserve. But rising seas and stronger storms will mean more disaster response missions.¹⁷⁴

Glaciers are melting at alarming rates. Tundra is burning. Permafrost is thawing. This is not a conspiracy. It's happening. Within a generation, Arctic sea ice may all but disappear in the summer. And so skeptics and cynics can insist on denying what's right in front of our eyes. But the Alaska Natives that I met, whose ancestral villages are sliding into the sea, don't have that luxury. They know climate change is real. They know it is not a hoax. And from Bangladesh to the Pacific islands, rising seas are swallowing land and forcing people from their

Without bolder action, our children won't have time to debate the existence of climate change. They'll be busy dealing with its effects: more environmental disasters, more economic disruptions, waves of climate refugees seeking sanctuary.
– Barack Obama, Jan. 10, 2017

¹⁷³ Jan. 20, 2009; June 14, 2014.

¹⁷⁴ May 20, 2015.

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homes. Around the world, stronger storms and more intense droughts will create humanitarian crises and risk more conflict. This is not just a moral issue, not just an economic issue, it is also an urgent matter of our national security.¹⁷⁵

This is the only planet we've got. And this may be the last shot we've got to save it. We're going to have to lead the way. We can roll back the pollution that we put in our skies and help economies lift people out of poverty without condemning our children to the ravages of an ever-warming climate. The same ingenuity that produced the Industrial Age and the Computer Age allows us to harness the potential of clean energy.

No country can escape the ravages of climate change. Climate change will impact every country on the planet. No nation is immune. Climate change constitutes a serious threat to global security, an immediate risk to our national security. And so we need to act, and we need to act now.

Around the world, climate change increases the risk of instability and conflict. Rising seas are already swallowing low-lying lands, from Bangladesh to Pacific islands, forcing people from their homes. Caribbean islands and Central American coasts are vulnerable as well. Globally, we could see a rise in climate change refugees. Elsewhere, more intense droughts will exacerbate shortages of water and food, increase competition for resources, and create the potential for mass migrations and new tensions. All of which is why *the Pentagon calls climate change a "threat multiplier."* *There's little scientific dispute that if we do nothing, we will face more drought, more famine, more mass displacement, all of which will fuel more conflict for decades.* Our common security hangs in the balance.¹⁷⁶

Climate change should not be a partisan issue. After all, it was Republicans who used to lead the way on new ideas to protect our environment. It was Teddy Roosevelt who first pushed for our magnificent national parks. It was Richard Nixon who signed the Clean Air Act and opened the EPA. George H.W. Bush said that "human activities are changing the atmosphere in unexpected and unprecedented ways." John McCain and other Republicans publicly supported free market-based cap-and-trade bills to slow carbon pollution.¹⁷⁷

Today's Congress is full of folks who stubbornly and automatically reject the scientific evidence about climate change. They will tell you it is a hoax or a fad. One Member of Congress actually says the world is cooling. There was one Member of Congress who mentioned a theory involving "dinosaur flatulence"—which I won't get into, but—[laughter]. When they're asked about climate change, they say, "Hey, look, I'm not a scientist." And I'll translate that for you.

¹⁷⁵ June 29, 2016.

¹⁷⁶ June 29, 2016; Sept. 28, 2015; May 20, 2015; Dec. 10, 2009.

¹⁷⁷ June 14, 2014.

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What that really means is, “I know that manmade climate change really is happening, but if I admit it, I’ll be run out of town by a radical fringe that thinks climate science is a liberal plot, so I’m not going to admit it.”

Well, I’m not a scientist, either. But you know what, I know a lot of really good scientists—[laughter]—at NASA and at NOAA and at our major universities. I do know that the overwhelming majority of scientists who work on climate change, including some who once disputed the data, have put that debate to rest. The writer Thomas Friedman recently put it to me this way. We were talking, and he says, “Your kid is sick, you consult 100 doctors; 97 of them tell you to do this, three tell [you] to do that, and you want to go with the three?”¹⁷⁸

Part of what’s unique about climate change is the nature of some of the opposition to action. It’s pretty rare that you’ll encounter somebody who says the problem you’re trying to solve simply doesn’t exist. When President Kennedy set us on a course for the Moon, there were a number of people who made a serious case that it wouldn’t be worth it, it was going to be too expensive, it was going to be too hard, it would take too long. But nobody ignored the science. I don’t remember anybody saying that the Moon wasn’t there or that it was made of cheese. [Laughter]

*In politics and in life, ignorance is not a virtue. That’s not challenging political correctness. That’s just not knowing what you’re talking about.
– Barack Obama, May 15, 2016*

We can and should argue about the best approach to solve the problem. But to simply deny the problem not only betrays future generations, it betrays the essential spirit of this country of innovation and practical problem-solving.

There is no stronger sign of leadership than putting future generations first. – Barack Obama, Sept. 28, 2015

Some may still deny the overwhelming judgment of science, but none can avoid the devastating impact of raging fires and crippling drought and more powerful storms. The path towards sustainable energy sources will be long and sometimes difficult. But America cannot resist this transition, we must lead it. We cannot cede to other nations the technology that will power new jobs and new industries, we must claim its promise. That’s how we will maintain our economic vitality and our national treasure—our forests and waterways, our croplands and snow-capped peaks. That is how we will preserve our planet, *commanded to our care by God.*¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ June 14, 2014; Jan. 20, 2015.

¹⁷⁹ June 14, 2014; Jan. 10, 2017; Jan. 21, 2013.

V. America in the World

American Leadership, Power, and Responsibility

Leadership

American leadership is the one constant in an uncertain world. It is America that has the capacity and the will to mobilize the world against terrorists. It is America that has rallied the world against Russian aggression and in support of the Ukrainian peoples' right to determine their own destiny. It is America—our scientists, our doctors, our know-how—that can help contain and cure the outbreak of Ebola.

America, our endless blessings bestow an enduring burden. But as Americans, we welcome our responsibility to lead. From Europe to Asia, from the far reaches of Africa to war-torn capitals of the Middle East, we stand for freedom, for justice, for dignity. These are values that have guided our Nation since its founding.

When we helped to prevent the massacre of civilians trapped on a distant mountain, here's what one of them said: "We owe our American friends our lives. Our children will always remember that there was someone who felt our struggle and made a long journey to protect innocent people."

That is the difference we make in the world. And our own safety, our own security, depends upon our willingness to do what it takes to defend this Nation and uphold the values that we stand for, timeless ideals that will endure long after those who offer only hate and destruction have been vanquished from the Earth.¹⁸⁰

America must always lead on the world stage. If we don't, no one else will. – Barack Obama, May 28, 2014

An aspect of American leadership is our effort to strengthen and enforce international order. For nearly seven decades, the United States has been the anchor of global security. This has meant doing more than forging international agreements. It has meant enforcing them. The burdens of leadership are often heavy, but the world is a better place because we have borne them. Because of America's efforts, because of American diplomacy and foreign assistance as well as the sacrifices of our military, more people live under elected governments today than at any time in human history.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Sept. 10, 2014.

¹⁸¹ May 28, 2014; Sept. 10, 2013.

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No other country in the world does what we do. On just about every issue, the world looks to us to set the agenda. In eight years, I have not gone to an international conference, summit, or meeting where we were not the ones who made the agenda possible, even if we weren't hosting it. When there's a problem around the world, they do not call Beijing or Moscow, they call us. When it comes to every important international issue, people of the world do not look to Beijing or Moscow to lead. And we lead not by dictating to others, but by working with them as partners, by treating other countries and their peoples with respect, not by lecturing them. This isn't just the right thing to do, it's in our self-interest. It makes countries more likely to work with us, and ultimately, it makes us more secure. So we need smart, steady, principled American leadership. *The world turns to us, not simply because of the size of our economy or our military might, but because of the ideals we stand for and the burdens we bear to advance them.*¹⁸²

When a typhoon hits the Philippines or schoolgirls are kidnapped in Nigeria or masked men occupy a building in Ukraine, it is America that the world looks to for help. So the United States is and remains the one indispensable nation. That has been true for the century passed, and it will be true for the century to come. – Barack Obama, May 28, 2014

Our leadership is defined not just by our defense against threats, but by the enormous opportunities to do good and promote understanding around the globe: to forge greater cooperation, to expand new markets, to free people from fear and want.

Leadership means a wise application of military power and rallying the world behind causes that are right. It means seeing our foreign assistance as a part of our national security, not something separate, not charity. When we lead nearly 200

If we fail to meet our responsibility to advance freedom, who would take our place, and what kind of world would we pass on? Our action, our leadership, is essential to the cause of human dignity. – Barack Obama, May 25, 2011

nations to the most ambitious agreement in history to fight climate change, yes, that helps vulnerable countries, but it also protects our kids. When we help Ukraine defend its democracy or Colombia resolve a decades-long war, that strengthens *the international order we depend on*. When we help African countries feed their people and care for the sick, it's the right thing to do, and it prevents the next pandemic from reaching our shores. Right now we're on track to end the scourge of HIV/AIDS. That's within our grasp. And we have the chance to accomplish the same thing with malaria. *That's American strength. That's American leadership.*¹⁸³

¹⁸² Jan. 28, 2014; June 2, 2016; Jan. 12, 2016.

¹⁸³ Jan. 28, 2014; Jan. 12, 2016.

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Since the days of Franklin Roosevelt and the service and sacrifice of our grandparents and great-grandparents, our country has borne a special burden in global affairs. We have spilled American blood in many countries on multiple continents. We have spent our revenue to help others rebuild from rubble and develop their own economies. We have joined with others to develop an architecture of institutions—from the United Nations to NATO to the World Bank—that provide for the common security and prosperity of human beings.

We have not always been thanked for these efforts, and we have at times made mistakes. But more than any other nation, the United States of America has underwritten global security for over six decades, a time that, for all its problems, has seen walls come down and markets open and billions lifted from poverty, unparalleled scientific progress and advancing frontiers of human liberty.

For unlike the great powers of old, we have not sought world domination. Our Union was founded in resistance to oppression. We do not seek to occupy other nations. We will not claim another nation's resources or target other peoples because their faith or ethnicity is different from ours. What we have fought for, what we continue to fight for, is a better future for our children and grandchildren. And we believe that their lives will be better if other peoples' children and grandchildren can live in freedom and access opportunity.

In the end, our security and leadership does not come solely from the strength of our arms. It derives from our people: from the workers and businesses who will rebuild our economy; from the entrepreneurs and researchers who will pioneer new industries; from the teachers that will educate our children and the service of those who work in our communities at home; from the diplomats and Peace Corps volunteers who spread hope abroad; and from the men and women in uniform who are part of an unbroken line of sacrifice that has made government of the people, by the people, and for the people a reality on this Earth.¹⁸⁴

Our strength abroad is anchored in our strength here at home. That must always be our North Star: the ability of our people to reach their potential, to make wise choices with our resources, to enlarge the prosperity that serves as a wellspring for our power, and to live the values that we hold so dear.

But let us also remember that for generations, we have done the hard work of protecting our own people, as well as millions around the globe. We have done so because we know that our own future is safer, our own future is brighter, if more of mankind can live with the bright light of freedom and dignity.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Dec. 1, 2009.

¹⁸⁵ March 28, 2011.

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Engagement

In the 21st century American isolationism is not an option. We don't have a choice to ignore what happens beyond our borders. If nuclear materials are not secure, that poses a danger to American cities. Regional aggression that goes unchecked anywhere in the world, will ultimately impact our allies and could draw in our military. We can't ignore what happens beyond our boundaries. And beyond these narrow rationales, I believe we have a real stake, an abiding self-interest, in making sure our children and our grandchildren grow up in a world where schoolgirls are not kidnapped and where individuals are not slaughtered because of tribe or faith or political belief. I believe that a world of greater freedom and tolerance is not only a moral imperative, it also helps to keep us safe.

Engagement does not just mean deploying our military. There are times where we must take military action to protect ourselves and our allies. Engagement means using all the levers of our national power and rallying the world to take on our shared challenges. – Barack Obama, May 15, 2016

I believe America must remain engaged for our own security. But I also believe the world is better for it. Some may disagree, but I believe America is exceptional, in part because we have shown a willingness through the sacrifice of blood and treasure to stand up not only for our own narrow self-interests, but for the interests of all.¹⁸⁶

The danger for the world is that the United States may disengage, creating a vacuum of leadership. – Barack Obama, Sept. 24, 2013

The biggest challenges we face cannot be solved in isolation. The major threats we face in the 21st century—whether it's global recession or violent extremism, the spread of nuclear weapons or pandemic disease—these things do not discriminate. They do not recognize borders. They do not see color. They do not target specific ethnic groups. No one nation can confront these challenges alone, and all nations have a stake in overcoming them. Our very survival has never required greater cooperation and greater understanding among all people from all places than at this moment in history. That is why we must listen to one another and seek common ground. That is why *we must build on our mutual interests and rise above our differences. We are stronger when we act together.*¹⁸⁷

We need to sustain our commitment to international cooperation rooted in the rights and responsibilities of nations. I know that for most of human history, power has not been unipolar. And the end of the Cold War may have led too many to forget this truth. *I've noticed as President that at times, both America's adversaries and some of our allies believe that all problems were either caused by*

¹⁸⁶ May 28, 2014; Sept. 24, 2013.

¹⁸⁷ May 15, 2016; May 17, 2009; April 6, 2009.

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*Washington or could be solved by Washington. [Laughter] And perhaps too many in Washington believe that as well. [Laughter] But I believe America has been a rare superpower in human history insofar as it has been willing to think beyond narrow self-interest; that while we've made our share of mistakes over these last 25 years—and I've acknowledged some—we have strived, sometimes at great sacrifice, to align better our actions with our ideals. And as a consequence, I believe we have been a force for good.*¹⁸⁸

The world that America seeks is not one we can build on our own. No matter how powerful our military, how strong our economy, the United States cannot solve the world's problems alone. Unless we work with other nations under the mantle of international norms and principles and law that offer legitimacy to our efforts, we will not succeed. And unless we work together to defeat the ideas that drive different communities in a country like Iraq into conflict, any order that our militaries can impose will be temporary.

America must remain engaged for our own security. But I also believe the world is better for it.
– Barack Obama, Sept. 24, 2013

A central question of our global age is whether we will solve our problems together, in a spirit of mutual interest and mutual respect, or whether we descend into the destructive rivalries of the past. When nations find common ground, not simply based on power, but on principle, then we can make enormous progress.

The interests of nations and peoples are shared. The religious convictions that we hold in our hearts can forge new bonds among people, or they can tear us apart. The technology we harness can light the path to peace, or forever darken it. The energy we use can sustain our planet, or destroy it. What happens to the hope of a single child, anywhere, can enrich our world, or impoverish it. We come from many places, but we share a common future.¹⁸⁹

At a time of upheaval overseas, when the news is filled with conflict and change, it can be tempting to turn away from the world. As we navigate this complex world, America can't be isolationist. It's not possible in this globalized, interconnected world.¹⁹⁰

We gain more from cooperation than conquest. We need to do more to strengthen the institutions that can anticipate and prevent problems from spreading. Our international community must continue to work with those who seek to build rather than to destroy.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ Sept. 20, 2016.

¹⁸⁹ Sept. 23, 2010; Sept. 28, 2015; Sept. 24, 2014; Sept. 23, 2009.

¹⁹⁰ March 28, 2011; June 2, 2016.

¹⁹¹ Sept. 24, 2014; May 28, 2014; Sept. 20, 2016.

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Power and Responsibility

*Great opportunities come with great responsibilities and with increased power comes increased responsibility. America has embraced unique responsibilities that come with our power. What sets us apart must not just be our power; it must also be the purpose behind it. Big countries, for most of history, have pushed smaller ones around. Rivals like Russia or China cannot match our influence around the world, unless we give up what we stand for and turn ourselves into just another big country that bullies smaller neighbors. The true source of our influence has been the values that we must never waver in defending around the world, the idea that all beings are endowed by our Creator with certain rights that cannot be denied.*¹⁹²

There's a debate going on in our country about our Nation's role in the world. And here's a fact: The United States of America remains the most powerful nation on Earth and a force for good. We have big challenges in our country: in our politics, our economy, our society. Those are challenges we have to address. But look around. We have the world's strongest economy. Our scientists, our researchers, our entrepreneurs are global leaders in innovation. Our colleges and universities attract the best talent from around the world. Our values—freedom, equality, opportunity—those values inspire people everywhere.¹⁹³

No other nation has sacrificed more—in treasure, in the lives of our sons and daughters—so that freedoms could take root and flourish around the world.
– Barack Obama, May 23, 2012

Earlier generations faced down fascism and communism not just with missiles and tanks but with sturdy alliances and enduring convictions. They understood that our power alone cannot protect us, nor does it entitle us to do as we please. Instead, they knew that our power grows through its prudent use. Our security emanates from the justness of our cause, the force of our example, the tempering qualities of humility and restraint. We are the keepers of this legacy. Guided by these principles once more, we can meet those new threats that demand even greater effort, even greater cooperation and understanding between nations.¹⁹⁴

The true source of our influence has been the values that we must never waver in defending around the world, the idea that all beings are endowed by our Creator with certain rights that cannot be denied. – Barack Obama, May 25, 2011

¹⁹² May 22, 2009; Nov. 8, 2010; Sept. 23, 2010; Jan. 25, 2011; Sept. 20, 2016; Jan. 10, 2017; May 25, 2011.

¹⁹³ June 2, 2016.

¹⁹⁴ Jan. 20, 2009.

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In an era when our destiny is shared, power is no longer a zero-sum game. No one nation can or should try to dominate another nation. No world order that elevates one nation or group of people over another will succeed. No balance of power among nations will hold. The traditional divisions between nations of the south and the north make no sense in an interconnected world; nor do alignments of nations rooted in the cleavages of a long-gone Cold War.¹⁹⁵

Leadership depends on the power of our example. How we're viewed in the world has consequences for our national security and for your lives. When other countries and people see us as partners, they're more willing to work with us.

An element of American leadership is our willingness to act on behalf of human dignity. American leadership at its best: we stand with people who fight for their own freedom, and we rally other nations on behalf of our common security and common humanity.¹⁹⁶

The world turns to us, not simply because of the size of our economy or our military might, but because of the ideals we stand for and the burdens we bear to advance them.
– Barack Obama, Jan. 28, 2014

After Pearl Harbor, some said the United States had been reduced to a third-rate power. Well, we rallied. We flew over the Hump and took island after island. We stormed the beaches and liberated nations. And we emerged from that war as the strongest power on the face of the Earth.

After Vietnam and the energy crisis of the 1970s, some said America had passed its high point. But the very next decade, because of our fidelity to the values we stand for, the Berlin Wall came tumbling down and liberty prevailed over the tyranny of the Cold War.

As recently as the 1980s, with the rise of Japan and the Asian Tigers, there were those who said we had lost our economic edge. But we retooled. We invested in new technologies. We launched an information revolution that changed the world.

After all this, you would think folks understand a basic truth: *Never bet against the United States of America*. And one of the reasons is that the United States has been, and will always be, the one indispensable nation in world affairs. It's one of the many examples of why America is exceptional. It's why I firmly believe that if we rise to this moment in history, if we meet our responsibilities, then—just like the 20th century—the 21st century will be another great American century. That's the future I see. That's the future you can build.¹⁹⁷

The idea of America endures. – Barack Obama, Jan. 25, 2011

¹⁹⁵ Sept. 23, 2009.

¹⁹⁶ Jan. 12, 2016; May 23, 2012; May 28, 2014; Sept. 10, 2014.

¹⁹⁷ May 23, 2012.

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In a world of complex threats, our security, our leadership, depends on all of the elements of our power. We've got to draw on every tool of our national power—including strong and principled diplomacy; military strength; law enforcement, intelligence, homeland security, economic might; development; moral suasion; the power of America's example; and the example of our ideals as a country that's committed to universal values, including the rule of law and human rights. And we must project a vision of the future that recognizes the real dangers that exist around the world, but also the limitless possibilities of our time.

When we encourage economic and political reforms—when citizens, especially young people, in other countries have jobs and can choose their own leaders and have their human rights and dignity upheld—that can help reduce the appeal of violent extremism. We now have hope of averting the worst effects of climate change and the instability that would threaten our national security because American leadership helped rally the world and forge the most ambitious agreement in history to fight climate change.

When we invest in the development that promotes education and opportunity around the globe, it can make conflicts and military interventions less likely later. So if you want to support our military, you also have to be in favor of foreign assistance that helps some young person learn in a very poor country, because it may end up making it less necessary to send our sons and daughters somewhere to fight. You can't separate the two.

Perhaps no element of our power is more enduring than the example that we set ourselves: the values we live as a nation and as individuals. That's how we won the Cold War: not just with the strength of our arms, but with the power of our ideas, the power of our example. It's how we defend our Nation because America doesn't just insist that other countries respect human rights, we have to uphold them as well and lead the way. It's how we treat those we capture.

So if we're going to seize the possibilities of our time, we have to use all these tools, a patient and disciplined strategy that uses every element of our national power, and we have to have the courage to chart new paths.¹⁹⁸

I believe in American exceptionalism with every fiber of my being. But what makes us exceptional is not our ability to flout international norms and the rule of law, it is our willingness to affirm them through our actions. We believe in the primacy of right over might. – Barack Obama, May 28, 2014; Jan. 10, 2017

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¹⁹⁸ Jan. 28, 2014; June 2, 2016; May 22, 2009; Aug. 31, 2010; Feb. 23, 2016; Jan. 12, 2016.

International Security, and Architecture

International Security: Vision and Realism

We seek a just and sustainable international order that promotes peace and security by meeting global challenges through stronger global cooperation. What we can do, what we must do, is work and reach and fight for the world that we seek, all of us. *The future must belong to those who create, not those who destroy. That is the future we must work for, and we must work for it together.*

Ultimately, the international community that America seeks is one where nations do not covet the land or resources of other nations, but one in which we carry out the founding purpose of the U.N., and where we all take responsibility; a world in which the rules established out of the horrors of war can help us resolve conflicts peacefully and prevent the kinds of wars that our forefathers fought; a world where human beings can live with dignity and meet their basic needs, whether they live in New York or Nairobi.¹⁹⁹

While freedom is a gift from God, it must be secured by His people here on Earth. – Barack Obama, Jan. 21, 2013

Global leadership requires us to see the world as it is, with all its danger and uncertainty. We have to be prepared for the worst, prepared for every contingency. But *American leadership also requires us to see the world as it should be: a place where the aspirations of individual human beings really matter, where hopes and not just fears govern, where the truths written into our founding documents can steer the currents of history in a direction of justice.*

We cannot separate our work here at home from challenges beyond our shores. Dangerous currents risk pulling us back into a darker, more disordered world. But today's world presents not just dangers, not just threats, it presents opportunities. – Barack Obama, Jan. 20, 2015; Sept. 28, 2015; Feb. 12, 2013

Even as we confront immediate challenges, we must also summon the foresight to look beyond them and consider, what are we trying to build over the long term? What is the world that awaits us when today's battles are brought to an end? The future we seek is security, prosperity, and dignity for all. As the world grows smaller, you might think it would be easier for human beings to recognize how similar we are, to understand that we're all basically seeking the same things. That we all hope for the chance to live out our lives with some measure of happiness and fulfillment for ourselves and our families.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Nov. 8, 2010; May 22, 2010; April 6, 2009; Sept. 24, 2013.

²⁰⁰ May 28, 2014; Sept. 23, 2010; Nov. 17, 2011; Dec. 10, 2009.

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The founding of the United Nations itself is a testament to human progress. When the cornerstone of this U.N. building was put in place, President Truman came here to New York and said, *“The United Nations is essentially an expression of the moral nature of man’s aspirations.”* The moral nature of man’s aspirations.

We’ve got to have the realism to see the world as it is: where sometimes uncomfortable compromises are necessary. But we also need the idealism that sees the world as it ought to be: a commitment to the universal values of democracy and equality and human rights and a willingness to stand up for them around the world, not just when it’s easy, but when it’s hard.

*We can understand that there will be war and still strive for peace. We can do that, for that is the story of human progress. That’s the hope of all the world, and at this moment of challenge, that must be our work here on Earth.*²⁰¹

The Nobel Peace Prize is an award that speaks to our highest aspirations, that for all the cruelty and hardship of our world, we are not mere prisoners of fate; our actions matter and can bend history in the direction of justice. When Alfred Nobel signed his last will and testament on November 27, 1895, it’s not entirely clear that he could have foreseen the impact that his prizes would have. But he did know this truth: That our destinies are what we make of them, and that each of us in our own lives can do our part in order to make a more just and lasting peace and forge the kind of world that we want to bequeath to our children and our grandchildren.²⁰²

We are clear eyed about the shortfalls of our international system. But America has not succeeded by stepping out of the currents of cooperation; we have succeeded by steering those currents in the direction of liberty and justice. We seek an international order where the rights and responsibilities of all nations and peoples are upheld and where countries thrive by meeting their obligations and face consequences when they don’t.

The United States does not fear the rise of peaceful, responsible emerging powers, we welcome them. Because when more nations step up and contribute to peace and security, that doesn’t undermine American power, it enhances it. And when other people in other countries see that we’re rooting for their success, it builds trust and partnerships that can advance our interests for generations. It makes it easier to meet common challenges, from preventing the spread of nuclear weapons to combating climate change.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Sept. 23, 2010; Sept. 21, 2011; June 2, 2016; Dec. 10, 2009.

²⁰² Dec. 10, 2009 (Nobel Banquet Remarks).

²⁰³ May 22, 2010; May 23, 2012.

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The International System and the International Architecture

After World War II, America had the wisdom to shape institutions to keep the peace and support human progress, from NATO and the United Nations to the World Bank and the IMF. These institutions are not perfect, but they have been a force multiplier.²⁰⁴

With other democracies, we built a post-World War II order based not just on military power or national affiliations, but on principles: the rule of law, human rights, freedom of religion and speech and assembly, and an independent press.
– Barack Obama, Jan. 10, 2017

The challenges of a new century demand new ways of serving our common interests. Just as the world has changed, the international architecture must change as well. We cannot rely on a rulebook written for a different century. If we're to meet the challenges of this century, we are all going to have to do more to build up international capacity. And evolving international institutions to meet the demands of today must be a critical part of American leadership. If we lift our eyes beyond our borders—if we think globally and if we act cooperatively—we can shape the course of this century, as our predecessors shaped the post-World War II age.

We must direct our effort to the task that President Kennedy called for long ago. “Let us focus,” he said, “on a more practical, more attainable peace, based not on a sudden revolution in human nature but on a gradual evolution in human institutions”—*a gradual evolution of human institutions*. What might this evolution look like? What might these practical steps be?

Agreements among nations, strong institutions, support for human rights, investments in development: all these are vital ingredients in bringing about the evolution that President Kennedy spoke about. And yet I do not believe that we will have the will, the determination, the staying power to complete this work without something more, and that's *the continued expansion of our moral imagination, an insistence that there's something irreducible that we all share*.

Build habits of cooperation that will grow stronger over time.
– Barack Obama, Sept. 24, 2013

We have to shape an international order that can meet the challenges of our generation. We need an international system where the universal rights of human beings are respected and violations of those rights are opposed. And that must include a commitment to support those who resolve conflicts peacefully, to sanction and stop those who don't, and to help those who have suffered. But ultimately, it will be vibrant democracies which roll back the causes of conflict and advance the frontiers of peace and prosperity.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ May 28, 2014.

²⁰⁵ Sept. 23, 2010; May 28, 2014; Sept. 24, 2014; Sept. 20, 2016; Dec. 10, 2009; May 22, 2010;

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Around the globe, we are seeing the same forces of global integration that have made us interdependent also expose deep fault lines in the existing international order. We see it in the headlines every day. Around the world, refugees flow across borders in flight from brutal conflict. Financial disruptions continue to weigh upon our workers and entire communities. Across vast swaths of the Middle East, basic security, basic order has broken down. We see too many governments muzzling journalists and quashing dissent and censoring the flow of information. Terrorist networks use social media to prey upon the minds of our youth, endangering open societies and spurring anger against innocent immigrants and Muslims. Powerful nations contest the constraints placed on them by international law.

You can try to control access to information, but you cannot turn a lie into truth. – Barack Obama, Sept. 28, 2015

This is the paradox that defines our world today. A quarter century after the end of the Cold War, the world is, by many measures, less violent and more prosperous than ever before, and yet our societies are filled with uncertainty and unease and strife. Despite enormous progress, as people lose trust in institutions, governing becomes more difficult, and tensions between nations become more quick to surface.

And so I believe that at this moment we all face a choice. We can choose to press forward with a better model of cooperation and integration. Or we can retreat into a world sharply divided, and ultimately in conflict, along age-old lines of nation and tribe and race and religion.

The nations of the world cannot return to the old ways of conflict and coercion. – Barack Obama, Sept. 28, 2015

I want to suggest to you today that we must go forward and not backward. I believe that as imperfect as they are, the principles of open markets and accountable governance, of democracy and human rights and international law that we have forged remain the firmest foundation for human progress in this century.²⁰⁶

Great opportunities come with great responsibilities, and with increased power comes increased responsibility. America has embraced unique responsibilities that come with our power. What sets us apart must not just be our power; it must also be the purpose behind it. Whatever mistakes we have made, the plain fact is this: The United States of America has helped underwrite global security for more than six decades with the blood of our citizens and the strength of our arms. I believe we have been a force for good. – Barack Obama, May 22, 2009; Nov. 8, 2010; Sept. 23, 2010; Jan. 25, 2011; Dec. 10, 2009; Sept. 20, 2016

July 11, 2009.

²⁰⁶ Sept. 20, 2016.

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International Law, Treaties, and Alliances

International Law:

The path to security and prosperity does not lie outside the boundaries of international law and respect for human rights. That's why the United Nations was established from the rubble of conflict. That is why liberty triumphed over tyranny in the Cold War. It is because of the progress that I've witnessed in my own lifetime that I remain ever hopeful about the world that we live in.²⁰⁷

We can only realize the promise of the U.N.'s founding—to replace the ravages of war with cooperation—if powerful nations like my own accept constraints. Sometimes, I'm criticized in my own country for professing a belief in international norms and multilateral institutions. But I am convinced that in the long run, giving up some freedom of action—not giving up our ability to protect ourselves or pursue our core interests, but binding ourselves to international rules over the long term—enhances our security. And I think that's not just true for us. We are all stakeholders in this international system, and it calls upon all of us to invest in the success of institutions to which we belong. And the good news is that many nations have shown what kind of progress is possible when we make those commitments.²⁰⁸

We must give expression to our best hopes, not our deepest fears. The United Nations was founded because men and women who came before us had the foresight to know that our nations are more secure when we uphold basic laws and basic norms and pursue a path of cooperation over conflict. And strong nations, above all, have a responsibility to uphold this international order.
– Barack Obama, Sept. 28, 2015

All of us—big nations and small—must meet our responsibility to observe and enforce international norms. I believe that all nations, strong and weak alike, must adhere to standards that govern the use of force. I, like any head of state, reserve the right to act unilaterally if necessary to defend my nation. Nevertheless, I am convinced that adhering to international standards strengthens those who do and isolates and weakens those who don't. The world rallied around America after the 9/11 attacks and supported our efforts in Afghanistan because of the horror of those senseless attacks and the recognized principle of self-defense. Likewise, the world

We believe that “right makes might,” that bigger nations should not be able to bully smaller ones, and that people should be able to choose their own future. These are simple truths, but they must be defended.
– Barack Obama, Sept. 24, 2014

²⁰⁷ Sept. 25, 2012.

²⁰⁸ Sept. 20, 2016.

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recognized the need to confront Saddam Hussein when he invaded Kuwait, a consensus that sent a clear message to all about the cost of aggression.²⁰⁹

In dealing with those nations that break rules and laws, I believe that we must develop alternatives to violence that are tough enough to actually change behavior. For if we want a lasting peace, then the words of the international community must mean something. Those regimes that break the rules must be held accountable. Sanctions must exact a real price. Intransigence must be met with increased pressure, and such pressure exists only when the world stands together as one.

We encourage the vision of a strong, regional security architecture that can bring effective, transnational forces to bear when needed.
– Barack Obama, July 11, 2009

The same principle applies to those who violate international laws by brutalizing their own people. When there is genocide in Darfur, systematic rape in Congo, repression in Burma, there must be consequences. Yes, there will be engagement; yes, there will be diplomacy. But there must be consequences when those things fail. And the closer we stand together, the less likely we will be faced with the choice between armed intervention and complicity in oppression.²¹⁰

In the South China Sea, the United States makes no claim on territory there. We don't adjudicate claims. But like every nation gathered here at the United Nations, we have an interest in upholding the basic principles of freedom of navigation and the free flow of commerce and in resolving disputes through *international law*, *not the law of force*. So we will defend these principles, while encouraging China and other claimants to resolve their differences peacefully.²¹¹

Fidelity to international order guides our responses to challenges around the world. Consider Russia's annexation of Crimea and further aggression in eastern Ukraine. America has few economic interests in Ukraine. We recognize the deep and complex history between Russia and Ukraine. But we cannot stand by when the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a nation is flagrantly violated. If that happens without consequence in Ukraine, it could happen to any nation.

Russia's actions in Ukraine challenge the postwar order. Here are the facts. After the people of Ukraine mobilized popular protests and calls for reform, their corrupt President fled. Against the will of the government in Kiev, Crimea was annexed. Russia poured arms into eastern Ukraine, fueling violent separatists and a conflict that has killed thousands. When a civilian airliner was shot down from areas that these proxies controlled, they refused to allow access to the crash for days. When Ukraine started to reassert control over its territory, Russia gave up

²⁰⁹ Sept. 24, 2014; Dec. 10, 2009.

²¹⁰ Dec. 10, 2009.

²¹¹ Sept. 28, 2015.

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the pretense of merely supporting the separatists and moved troops across the border.

This is a vision of the world in which might makes right, a world in which one nation's borders can be redrawn by another and civilized people are not allowed to recover the remains of their loved ones because of the truth that might be revealed. America stands for something different. We believe that "right makes might," that bigger nations should not be able to bully smaller ones, and that people should be able to choose their own future.

And these are simple truths, but they must be defended. America and our allies will support the people of Ukraine as they develop their democracy and economy. We will reinforce our NATO allies and uphold our commitment to collective self-defense. We will impose a cost on Russia for aggression, and we will counter falsehoods with the truth. And we call upon others to join us on the right side of history.²¹²

American influence is always stronger when we lead by example. We can't exempt ourselves from the rules that apply to everybody else. We can't call on others to make commitments to combat climate change if a whole lot of our political leaders deny that it's taken place. I believe in American exceptionalism with every fiber of my being. But what makes us exceptional is not our ability to flout international norms and the rule of law, it is our willingness to affirm them through our actions. America does not simply stand for stability or the absence of conflict, no matter what the cost. We stand for the more lasting peace that can only come through opportunity and freedom for people everywhere.²¹³

Unless we work with other nations under the mantle of international norms and principles and law that offer legitimacy to our efforts, we will not succeed. – Barack Obama, Sept. 28, 2015

Perhaps no element of our power is more enduring than the example that we set ourselves: the values we live as a nation and as individuals. That's how we won the Cold War: not just with the strength of our arms, but with the power of our ideas, the power of our example. It's how we defend our Nation because America doesn't just insist that other countries respect human rights, we have to uphold them as well and lead the way. It's how we treat those we capture. America has to stand for rule of law. – Barack Obama, June 2, 2016

²¹² Sept. 28, 2015; Sept. 24, 2014.

²¹³ May 28, 2014.

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Treaties and Alliances:

America will remain the anchor of strong alliances in every corner of the globe. And we will renew those institutions that extend our capacity to manage crises abroad, for no one has a greater stake in a peaceful world than its most powerful nation. America believes that we will be safer when our friends are safer, that we will be stronger when the world is more just.²¹⁴

One of the most effective ways to lead and work with others is through treaties that advance our interests. We don't always realize it, but treaties help make a lot of things in our lives possible that we take for granted, from international phone calls to mail. Those are good things. Those are not a threat to our sovereignty. I think we can all agree on that. But also from NATO to treaties controlling nuclear weapons, treaties help keep us safe. And treaties are not a new thing. The power to make treaties is written into our Constitution. Our Founding Fathers ratified lots of treaties.

We can't try to resolve problems in the South China Sea when we have refused to make sure that the Law of the Sea Convention is ratified by our United States Senate, despite the fact that our top military leaders say the treaty advances our national security. That's not leadership, that's retreat. That's not strength, that's weakness. It would be utterly foreign to leaders like Roosevelt and Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy.²¹⁵

At its core, NATO is rooted in the simple concept of Article V: that no NATO nation will have to fend on its own, that allies will stand by one another always. And for six decades, NATO has been the most successful alliance in human history—one of the oldest and strongest alliances the world has ever known. Our efforts in this young century have led us to a new concept for NATO that will give us the capabilities needed to meet new threats, threats like terrorism and piracy, cyberattacks, and ballistic missiles. But a revitalized NATO will continue to hew to that original vision of its founders, allowing us to rally collective action for the defense of our people, while building upon the broader belief of Roosevelt and Churchill that all nations have both rights and responsibilities and all nations share a common interest in an international architecture that maintains the peace.²¹⁶

After the 9/11 attacks on the United States, for the first time in its history, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) invoked Article V, the commitment that says an attack on one member nation is an attack on all.
– Barack Obama, Dec. 1, 2009

²¹⁴ Jan. 21, 2013; May 22, 2010.

²¹⁵ June 2, 2016; May 28, 2014.

²¹⁶ May 25, 2011.

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In a world where too many borders are a source of conflict, Canada and the United States are joined by the longest border of peace on Earth. And what makes our relationship so unique is not just proximity. It's our enduring commitment to a set of values, a spirit, that says no matter who we are, where we come from, what our last names are, what faith we practice, here we can make of our lives what we will.

We're bound as well by the service of those who have defended us: at Flanders Field, the beaches of Normandy, in the skies of the Balkans, and more recently, in the mountains of Afghanistan and training bases in Iraq.

We're linked together, as well, by the institutions that we've built to keep the peace: a United Nations to advance our collective aspirations; a NATO alliance to ensure our security; NORAD, where Americans and Canadians stand watch side by side and track Santa on Christmas Eve. [Laughter] We're linked by a vast web of commerce that carries goods from one end of this continent to another. Our relationship is so remarkable precisely because it seems so unremarkable, which is why Americans often are surprised when our favorite American actor or singer turns out to be Canadian! The point is, *we see ourselves in each other, and our lives are richer for it.*²¹⁷

The Canadian Parliament: a cathedral of freedom. – Barack Obama, June 29, 2016

Australia and the United States are two of the world's oldest democracies and two of the world's oldest friends, and we mark the 60th anniversary of our unbreakable alliance. The bonds between us run deep. In each other's story we see so much of ourselves: ancestors who crossed vast oceans, some by choice, some in chains; settlers who pushed west across sweeping plains; dreamers who toiled with hearts and hands to lay railroads and to build cities; generations of immigrants who with each new arrival add a new thread to the brilliant tapestry of our nations; and *we are citizens who live by a common creed—no matter who you are, no matter what you look like, everyone deserves a fair chance, everyone deserves a fair go.*

Nor has our progress come without great sacrifice. This morning I was humbled and deeply moved by a visit to your war memorial to pay my respects to Australia's fallen sons and daughters. Later today, in Darwin, I'll join the Prime Minister in saluting our brave men and women in uniform. And it will be a reminder that from the trenches of the First World War to the mountains of Afghanistan, *Aussies and Americans have stood together, we have fought together, we have given lives together in every single major conflict of the past hundred years—every single one.*

This solidarity has sustained us through a difficult decade. We will never forget the attacks of 9/11 that took the lives not only of Americans, but people

²¹⁷ June 29, 2016.

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from many nations, including Australia. In the United States, we will never forget how Australia invoked the ANZUS Treaty for the first time ever, showing that our two nations stood as one. And none of us will ever forget those we've lost to Al Qaida's terrorism in the years since, including innocent Australians.

As two global partners, we stand up for the security and the dignity of people around the world. We see it when our rescue workers rush to help others in times of fire and drought and flooding rains. We see it when we partner to keep the peace, from East Timor to the Balkans, and when we pursue our shared vision: a world without nuclear weapons. We see it in the development that lifts up a child in Africa, the assistance that saves a family from famine, and when we extend our support to the people of the Middle East and North Africa, who deserve the same liberty that allows us to gather in this great hall of democracy.²¹⁸

We, the UK and America, are allies who landed at Omaha and Gold, who sacrificed side by side to free a continent from the march of tyranny and help prosperity flourish from the ruins of war. And with the founding of NATO, a British idea, we joined a transatlantic alliance that has ensured our security for over half a century. Together with our allies, we forged a lasting peace from a Cold War. When the Iron Curtain lifted, we expanded our alliance to include the nations of Central and Eastern Europe and built new bridges to Russia and the former states of the Soviet Union. And when there was strife in the Balkans, we worked together to keep the peace. Together, we have met great challenges.²¹⁹

The United Nations founding charter calls upon us "to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security." And Article 1 of this General Assembly's Universal Declaration of Human Rights reminds us that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and in rights." Those bedrock beliefs—in the responsibility of states and the rights of men and women—must be our guide.²²⁰

Enduring security and lasting peace do not require perpetual war. We are heirs to those who won the peace and not just the war; who turned sworn enemies into the surest of friends. And we must carry those lessons forward. – Barack Obama, Jan. 21, 2013

²¹⁸ Nov. 17, 2011.

²¹⁹ May 25, 2011.

²²⁰ Sept. 21, 2011.

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Military Force, and the Military

The Use of Military Force:

As Commander in Chief, I have no greater responsibility than the security of the American people. My first duty as Commander in Chief is to defend the United States of America. No decision weighs on me more than when to deploy our men and women in uniform. I will never hesitate to use our military swiftly, decisively, and unilaterally when necessary to defend our people, our homeland, our allies, and our core interests.

There will be times, though, when our safety is not directly threatened, but our interests and our values are. Sometimes the course of history poses challenges that threaten our common humanity and our common security: responding to

Make no mistake: Evil does exist in the world. A nonviolent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies. Negotiations cannot convince Al Qaida's leaders to lay down their arms. To say that force may sometimes be necessary is not a call to cynicism; it is a recognition of history, the imperfections of man, and the limits of reason. – Barack Obama, Dec. 10, 2009

natural disasters, for example, or preventing genocide and keeping the peace, ensuring regional security and maintaining the flow of commerce. These may not be America's problems alone, but they are important to us. And in these circumstances, we know that the United States, as the world's most powerful nation, will often be called upon to help. American power can make a decisive difference, but we cannot do for others what they must do for themselves.

The United States will use military force, unilaterally if necessary, when our core interests demand it: when our people are threatened, when our livelihoods are at stake, when the security of our allies is in danger. In these circumstances, we still need to ask tough questions about whether our actions are proportional and effective and just.

On the other hand, when issues of global concern do not pose a direct threat to the United States, when such issues are at stake—when crises arise that stir our conscience or push the world in a more dangerous direction, but do not directly threaten us—then the threshold for military action must be higher. In such circumstances, we should not go it alone. Instead, we must mobilize allies and partners to take collective action. We have to broaden our tools to include diplomacy and development; sanctions and isolation; appeals to international law; and if just, necessary, and effective, multilateral military action. In such circumstances, we have to work with others because collective action in these circumstances is more likely to succeed, more likely to be sustained, less likely to lead to costly mistakes.²²¹

²²¹ Dec. 6, 2015; Jan. 20, 2015; March 28, 2011; Sept. 10, 2014; May 28, 2014.

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There are some who must be met by force, but many of the threats to our security cannot be solved by military force alone. When we make rash decisions, reacting to the headlines instead of using our heads, when the first response to a challenge is to send in our military, then we risk getting drawn into unnecessary conflicts and neglect the broader strategy we need for a safer, more prosperous world. That's what our enemies want us to do.²²²

To say that we have an interest in pursuing peace and freedom beyond our borders is not to say that every problem has a military solution. Leading wisely also means resisting the temptation to intervene militarily every time there's a problem or crisis in the world. History is littered with the ruins of empires and nations that overextended themselves, draining their power and influence. And so we have to chart a smarter path. As we saw in Vietnam and the Iraq war, oftentimes the greatest damage to American credibility comes when we overreach, when we don't think through the consequences of all of our actions.

Mindful of the risks and costs of military action, suggestions for deeper U.S. military involvement in a conflict like the Syrian civil war have to be fully thought through, rigorously examined with an honest assessment of the risks and tradeoffs. How will it alter the conflict? What comes next? When we ask those questions, we prevent the kind of mission creep that history teaches us to avoid.²²³

We must strengthen our collective capacity to establish security where order has broken down and to support those who seek a just and lasting peace. When peaceful democratic movements are suppressed, the democracies of the world cannot remain silent. *When a dictator slaughters tens of thousands of his own people, that is not just a matter of one nation's internal affairs, it breeds human suffering on an order of magnitude that affects us all. Likewise, when a terrorist group beheads captives, slaughters the innocent, and enslaves women, that's not a single nation's national security problem, that is an assault on all our humanity.* There will be times when the breakdown of societies is so great, the violence against civilians so substantial, that the international community will be called upon to act. And these challenges will grow more pronounced as we are confronted with states that are fragile or failing, places where horrendous violence can put innocent men, women, and children at risk, with no hope of protection from their national institutions.²²⁴

²²² April 6, 2009; June 2, 2016; Jan. 20, 2015.

²²³ May 28, 2014; June 2, 2016; March 28, 2011.

²²⁴ Sept. 28, 2015; Nov. 8, 2010; Sept. 24, 2013.

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We live in a world of imperfect choices. Different nations will not agree on the need for action in every instance, and the principle of sovereignty is at the center of our international order. But sovereignty cannot be a shield for tyrants to commit wanton murder or an excuse for the international community to turn a blind eye. We may not be able to remedy every evil, and while we need to be mindful that the world is full of unintended consequences, should we really accept the notion that the world is powerless in the face of a Rwanda or Srebrenica? And if we don't want to choose between inaction and war, we must get better—all of us—at the policies that prevent the breakdown of basic order: through respect for the responsibilities of nations and the rights of individuals; through meaningful sanctions for those who break the rules; through dogged diplomacy that resolves the root causes of conflict, not merely its aftermath; through development assistance that brings hope to the marginalized. And yes, sometimes—although this will not be enough—there are going to be moments where the international community will need to acknowledge that the multilateral use of military force may be required to prevent the very worst from occurring.²²⁵

America—in fact, no nation—can insist that others follow the rules of the road if we refuse to follow them ourselves. For when we don't, our actions appear arbitrary and undercut the legitimacy of future interventions, no matter how justified. And this becomes particularly important when the purpose of military action extends beyond self-defense or the defense of one nation against an aggressor. More and more, we all confront difficult questions about how to prevent the slaughter of civilians by their own government or to stop a civil war whose violence and suffering can engulf an entire region.

I believe that force can be justified on humanitarian grounds, as it was in the Balkans or in other places that have been scarred by war. Inaction tears at our conscience and can lead to more costly intervention later. That's why all responsible nations must embrace the role that militaries with a clear mandate can play to keep the peace.

In taking direct action, we must uphold standards that reflect our values. When we cannot explain our efforts clearly and publicly, we face terrorist propaganda and international suspicion, we erode legitimacy with our partners and our people, and we reduce accountability in our own government.

Where force is necessary, we have a moral and strategic interest in binding ourselves to certain rules of conduct. And even as we confront a vicious adversary that abides by no rules, I believe the United States of America must remain a standard bearer in the conduct of war. *We lose ourselves when we compromise the very ideals that we fight to defend, and we honor those ideals by upholding them not when it's easy, but when it is hard.*²²⁶

²²⁵ Sept. 24, 2013.

²²⁶ Dec. 10, 2009; May 28, 2014.

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Military Service:

The future we seek is only within reach because of our men and women in uniform. Time and again, they have answered the call to serve in distant and dangerous places. In an age when so many institutions have come up short, these Americans stood tall. And in their faces we see what is best in ourselves and our country. We draw inspiration from our fellow Americans who have sacrificed so much on our behalf, troops who sacrifice every day to protect us.

Above all, our freedom endures because of the men and women in uniform who defend it. Together, let us pay tribute to all of our men and women who have served and sacrificed, for they are part of an unbroken line of heroes who have borne the heaviest burden for our freedoms. We must never forget that the things we've struggled for and fought for live in the hearts of people everywhere. And we must always remember that the Americans who have borne the greatest burden in this struggle are the men and women who serve our country.²²⁷

Brave Americans, at this very hour, patrol far-off deserts and distant mountains. They have something to tell us today, just as our fallen heroes do. We honor them not only because they are guardians of our liberty, but because they embody the spirit of service, a willingness to find meaning in something greater than themselves.
– Barack Obama, Jan. 20, 2009

Our soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and coastguardsmen have done their duty. Now we must summon that same sense of common purpose. We must give our veterans and military families the support they deserve and the opportunities they have earned. And we must redouble our efforts to build a nation worthy of their sacrifice.

Today we recall the fallen and those who suffered wounds, both seen and unseen. But through dark days, we have drawn strength from their example and the ideals that have guided our Nation and led the world: a belief that all people are treated equal and deserve the freedom to determine their destiny. That is the light that guides us still.²²⁸

If you want somebody who's going to get the job done and done right, hire a veteran.
– Barack Obama, Jan. 20, 2015

When a loved one is deployed, the whole family goes to war.
– Barack Obama, May 22, 2009

As we near Memorial Day, we pay tribute to all those who have made the ultimate sacrifice so that we might live free. These Americans gave their lives for the values that have lived in the hearts of our people for over two centuries. We honor them all, now and forever.²²⁹

²²⁷ Nov. 17, 2011; May 2, 2012; June 22, 2011; Feb. 12, 2013; Jan. 24, 2012; May 25, 2011; Jan. 25, 2011.

²²⁸ May 2, 2012.

²²⁹ May 22, 2009; May 24, 2013; Aug. 31, 2010.

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To Servicemembers and Military Graduates:

You carry forward a legacy that no other military in human history can claim. You will represent a nation with history and hope on our side. Your charge now is not only to protect our country, but to do what is right and just. Your lives will be defined by something inside of you, invisible to the eye, but obvious for all to see. The arc of your careers, like the course of our country, will be shaped by the values that have kept us strong for more than 200 years. We need your honor, that inner compass that guides you, not when the path is easy and obvious, but when it's hard and uncertain; that tells you the difference between that which is right and that which is wrong. We need your honor, and we need your courage. Even more than physical courage, we need your moral courage: the strength to do what's right, especially when it's unpopular. Because at the end of the day and at the end of your career, you want to look in the mirror and say with confidence and with pride, I fulfilled my oath. I did my duty. I stayed true to my values.²³⁰

The men and women in uniform are part of an unbroken line of sacrifice that has made government of the people, by the people, and for the people a reality on this Earth. – Barack Obama, Dec. 1, 2009

“Who lives here reveres honor, honors duty.” Here are the ideals that endure. – Barack Obama, May 18, 2011; May 22, 2009

America's Army represents the full breadth of America's experience. You come from every corner of our country, from privilege and from poverty, from cities and small towns. You worship all of the great religions that enrich the life of our people. You include the vast diversity of race and ethnicity that is fundamental to our Nation's strength.²³¹

For so many people around the world, you are the face of America. – Barack Obama, May 22, 2009

From the birth of our existence, America has had a faith in the future, a belief that where we're going is better than where we've been, even when the path ahead is uncertain. To fulfill that promise, generations of Americans have built upon the foundation of our forefathers, finding opportunity, fighting injustice, forging a more perfect Union. Our achievement would not be possible without the Long Gray Line that has sacrificed for duty, for honor, for country. And years from now when you return here, I have no doubt that we will have prevailed in the struggles of our times. I have no doubt that your legacy will be an America that has emerged stronger and a world that is more just, because *we are Americans, and our destiny is never written for us, it is written by us.*²³²

²³⁰ May 28, 2014; May 18, 2011; May 24, 2013.

²³¹ May 22, 2010.

²³² May 22, 2010.

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The United Nations

Today, we see the collapse of strongmen and fragile states breeding conflict and driving innocent men, women, and children across borders on an epic scale. Brutal networks of terrorism have stepped into the vacuum. Technologies that empower individuals are now also exploited by those who spread disinformation or suppress dissent or radicalize our youth. Global capital flows have powered growth and investment, but also increased risk of contagion, weakened the bargaining power of workers, and accelerated inequality.

How should we respond to these trends? There are those who argue that the ideals enshrined in the U.N. Charter are unachievable or out of date, a legacy of a postwar era not suited to our own. Effectively, they argue for a return to the rules that applied for most of human history and that predate this institution: the belief that power is a zero-sum game, that might makes right, that strong states must impose their will on weaker ones, that the rights of individuals don't matter, and that in a time of rapid change, order must be imposed by force.

Each of us as leaders, each nation, can choose to reject those who appeal to our worst impulses and embrace those who appeal to our best. For we have shown that we can choose a better history.
– Barack Obama, Sept. 20, 2016

On this basis, we see some major powers assert themselves in ways that contravene international law. We see an erosion of the democratic principles and human rights that are fundamental to this institution's mission; information is strictly controlled, the space for civil society restricted. We're told that such retrenchment is required to beat back disorder, that it's the only way to stamp out terrorism or prevent foreign meddling. In accordance with this logic, we should support tyrants like Bashar al-Asad, who drops barrel bombs to massacre innocent children, because the alternative is surely worse.

The increasing skepticism of our international order can also be found in the most advanced democracies. We see greater polarization; more frequent gridlock; movements on the far right, and sometimes the left, that insist on stopping the trade that binds our fates to other nations, and calling for the building of walls to keep out immigrants. And most ominously, we see the fears of ordinary people being exploited through appeals to sectarianism or tribalism or racism or anti-Semitism; appeals to a glorious past before the body politic was infected by those who look different or worship God differently; a politics of "us" versus "them."

The United States is not immune from this. We see an argument made that the only strength that matters for the United States is bellicose words and shows of military force, that cooperation and diplomacy will not work.

As President of the United States, I am mindful of the dangers that we face; they cross my desk every morning. I lead the strongest military that the world has ever known, and I will never hesitate to protect my country or our allies,

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unilaterally and by force where necessary. But I stand before you today believing in my core that we, *the nations of the world, cannot return to the old ways of conflict and coercion. We cannot look backwards. We live in an integrated world, one in which we all have a stake in each other's success. We cannot turn back those forces of integration.* No nation in this U.N. Assembly can insulate itself from the threat of terrorism or the risk of financial contagion, the flow of migrants, or the danger of a warming planet. The disorder we see is not driven solely by competition between nations or any single ideology. And if we cannot work together more effectively, we will all suffer the consequences.²³³

Seventy years after the founding of the United Nations, it is worth reflecting on what, together, the members of this body have helped to achieve. Out of the ashes of the Second World War, having witnessed the unthinkable power of the atomic age, the United States has worked with many nations in this Assembly to prevent a third world war: by forging alliances with old adversaries, by supporting the steady emergence of strong democracies accountable to their people instead of any foreign power, and by building an international system that imposes a cost on those who choose conflict over cooperation, an order that recognizes the dignity and equal worth of all people.

That is the work of seven decades. That is the ideal that this body, at its best, has pursued. Of course, there have been too many times when, collectively, we have fallen short of these ideals. Over seven decades, terrible conflicts have claimed untold victims. But we have pressed forward, slowly, steadily, to make a system of international rules and norms – that are better and stronger and more consistent.

It is this international order that has underwritten unparalleled advances in human liberty and prosperity. It is this collective endeavor that's brought about diplomatic cooperation between the world's major powers and buttressed a global economy that has lifted more than a billion people from poverty. It is these international principles that have helped constrain bigger countries from imposing our will on smaller ones and advanced the emergence of democracy and development and individual liberty on every continent.

Promoting shared prosperity, preserving peace and security, strengthening democratic governance and human rights, these are the responsibilities of leadership.
– Barack Obama, Nov. 8, 2010

This progress is real. It can be documented in lives saved and agreements forged and diseases conquered and in mouths fed. And yet we come together today knowing that the march of human progress never travels in a straight line, that our work is far from complete.²³⁴

²³³ Sept. 28, 2015.

²³⁴ Sept. 28, 2015.

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There are a lot of skeptics who often downplay the effectiveness of multilateral action. For them, working through international institutions like the U.N. or respecting international law is a sign of weakness. I think they're wrong.

One year ago, the people of Libya were ruled by the world's longest-serving dictator. But faced with bullets and bombs and a dictator who threatened to hunt them down like rats, they showed relentless bravery. We will never forget the words of the Libyan who stood up in those early days of the revolution and said: "Our words are free now. It's a feeling you can't explain." Day after day, in the face of bullets and bombs, the Libyan people refused to give back that freedom. And when they were threatened by the kind of mass atrocity that often went unchallenged in the last century, the United Nations lived up to its charter. The Security Council authorized all necessary measures to prevent a massacre. The Arab League called for this effort. Arab nations joined a NATO-led coalition that halted Qadhafi's forces in their tracks.

In the months that followed, the will of the coalition proved unbreakable, and the will of the Libyan people could not be denied. Forty-two years of tyranny were ended in six months. This is how the international community is supposed to work: nations standing together for the sake of peace and security and individuals claiming their rights.²³⁵

Through the citizens of every conceivable ancestry who make New York City their own, we see living proof that opportunity can be accessed by all, that what unites us as human beings is far greater than what divides us, and that people from every part of this world can live together in peace.²³⁶

The people of our United Nations are not as different as they are told. They can be made to fear, they can be taught to hate, but they can also respond to hope. History is littered with the failure of false prophets and fallen empires who believed that might always makes right, and that will continue to be the case. You can count on that. But we are called upon to offer a different type of leadership, leadership strong enough to recognize that nations share common interests and people share a common humanity and, yes, there are certain ideas and principles that are universal. That's what those who shaped the United Nations 70 years ago understood. Let us carry forward that faith into the future, for it is the only way we can assure that future will be brighter for my children and for yours.²³⁷

No children are born hating, and no children anywhere should be educated to hate other people. – Barack Obama, Sept. 24, 2014

²³⁵ May 28, 2014; Sept. 21, 2011.

²³⁶ Sept. 23, 2010.

²³⁷ Sept. 28, 2015.

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In his fourth and final Inaugural Address, a weary Franklin Roosevelt spoke to the American people. After years of war, he sought to sum up the lessons that could be drawn from the terrible suffering, the enormous sacrifice that had taken place. “We have learned,” he said, “to be citizens of the world, members of the human community.” The United Nations was built by men and women like Roosevelt from every corner of the world: from Africa and Asia, from Europe to the Americas. These architects of international cooperation had an idealism that was anything but naive; it was rooted in the hard-earned lessons of war, rooted in the wisdom that nations could advance their interests by acting together instead of splitting apart.

This institution, the United Nations, will be what we make of it. – Barack Obama, Sept. 23, 2009

This body was founded on the belief that the nations of the world could solve their problems together. Franklin Roosevelt, who died before he could see his vision for this institution become a reality, put it this way, and I quote: “The structure of world peace cannot be the work of one man, or one party, or one nation. It cannot be a peace of large nations, or of small nations. It must be a peace which rests on the cooperative effort of the whole world.” *The cooperative effort of the whole world*; those words ring even more true today, when it is not simply peace, but our very health and prosperity that we hold in common.²³⁸

“Our problems are manmade, therefore they can be solved by man.” – President John Kennedy, quoted by Barack Obama, Sept. 8, 2011

Each year we come together to reaffirm the founding vision of this institution. For most of recorded history, individual aspirations were subject to the whims of tyrants and empires. Divisions of race and religion and tribe were settled through the sword and the clash of armies. The idea that nations and peoples could come together in peace to solve their disputes and advance a common prosperity seemed unimaginable.

It took the awful carnage of two world wars to shift our thinking. The leaders who built the United Nations were not naive; they did not think this body could eradicate all wars. But in the wake of millions dead and continents in rubble, and with the development of nuclear weapons that could annihilate a planet, they understood that humanity could not survive the course it was on. And so they gave us this institution, believing that it could allow us to resolve conflicts, enforce rules of behavior, and *build habits of cooperation that would grow stronger over time.*²³⁹

Government of the people, by the people, and for the people is more likely to bring about the stability, prosperity, and individual opportunity that serve as a basis for peace in our world. – Barack Obama, Sept. 25, 2012

²³⁸ Sept. 23, 2009.

²³⁹ Sept. 24, 2013.

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We come together at a crossroad between war and peace, between disorder and integration, between fear and hope. Around the globe, there are signposts of progress. The shadow of world war that existed at the founding of this institution, the United Nations, has been lifted, and the prospect of war between major powers reduced. The ranks of member states have more than tripled, and more people live under governments they elected. Hundreds of millions of human beings have been freed from the prison of poverty, with the proportion of those living in extreme poverty cut in half. And the world economy continues to strengthen after the worst financial crisis of our lives.

The United Nations was born of the belief that the people of the world can live their lives, raise their families, and resolve their differences peacefully. At the heart of the United Nations is the pursuit of peace in an imperfect world. – Barack Obama, Sept. 23, 2009; Sept. 21, 2011

Today, whether you live in downtown Manhattan or in my grandmother's village more than 200 miles from Nairobi, you can hold in your hand more information than the world's greatest libraries. Together, we've learned how to cure disease and harness the power of the wind and the sun. The very existence of this institution is a unique achievement: the people of the world committing to resolve their differences peacefully and to solve their problems together.

And yet there is a pervasive unease in our world, a sense that the very forces that have brought us together have created new dangers and made it difficult for any single nation to insulate itself from global forces. As we gather here, an outbreak of Ebola overwhelms public health systems in West Africa and threatens to move rapidly across borders. Russian aggression in Europe recalls the days when large nations trampled small ones in pursuit of territorial ambition. The brutality of terrorists in Syria and Iraq forces us to look into the heart of darkness.

Fellow delegates, we come together as united nations with a choice to make. We can renew the international system that has enabled so much progress, or we can allow ourselves to be pulled back by an undertow of instability. We can reaffirm our collective responsibility to confront global problems or be swamped by more and more outbreaks of instability. And for America, the choice is clear: We choose hope over fear. We see the future not as something out of our control, but as something we can shape for the better through concerted and collective effort. We reject fatalism or cynicism when it comes to human affairs. *We choose to work for the world as it should be, as our children deserve it to be.*²⁴⁰

"The United Nations is essentially an expression of the moral nature of man's aspirations." – President Harry Truman, quoted by Barack Obama, Sept. 21, 2011

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²⁴⁰ Sept. 24, 2014.

Threats to Peace

Threats

In the 21st century, we do not have the luxury of deciding which challenges to prepare for and which to ignore. We must overcome the full spectrum of threats, the conventional and the unconventional; the nation-state and the terrorist network; the spread of deadly technologies and the spread of hateful ideologies; 18th century-style piracy and 21st-century cyberthreats.²⁴¹

Extremism

To overcome extremism, we must be vigilant in upholding the values our troops defend, because there is no force in the world more powerful than the example of America. We should not discard our freedoms because extremists try to exploit them. We cannot succumb to division because others try to drive us apart. We are the United States of America. *We are the United States of America*, and we have repaired our Union and faced down fascism and outlasted communism. We've gone through turmoil, we've gone through civil war, and we have come out stronger, and we will do so once more.

And I know this to be true because I see the strength and resilience of the American people. Terrorists want to

The framework to combat extremism must be forged within the rule of law.
– Barack Obama, Sept. 23, 2009

scare us, New Yorkers just go about their lives unafraid. Extremists want a war between America and Islam, but Muslims are part of our national life, including those who serve in our United States Army. Adversaries want to divide us, but we are united by our support for our soldiers who send a clear message that this country is both the land of the free and the home of the brave.²⁴²

As we look to the future, one issue risks a cycle of conflict that could derail so much progress, and that is the cancer of violent extremism that has ravaged so many parts of the Muslim world. It is the responsibility of Muslims around the world to root out misguided ideas that lead to radicalization. To speak out against not just acts of violence, but also those interpretations of Islam that are incompatible with the values of religious tolerance, mutual respect, and human dignity. But it is also the responsibility of all Americans, of every faith, to reject discrimination. It is our responsibility to reject religious tests on who we admit into this country. It's our responsibility to reject proposals that Muslim Americans should somehow be treated differently. Because when we travel down that road,

²⁴¹ May 22, 2009.

²⁴² Feb. 24, 2009; May 22, 2010.

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we lose. That kind of divisiveness, that betrayal of our values, plays into the hands of groups like ISIL. Muslim Americans are our friends and our neighbors, our coworkers, our sports heroes. And yes, they are our men and women in uniform who are willing to die in defense of our country.²⁴³

The ideology of ISIL or Al Qaida or Boko Haram will wilt and die if it is consistently exposed and confronted and refuted in the light of day. Look at the young British Muslims who responded to terrorist propaganda by starting the “NotInMyName” campaign, declaring that ISIL “is hiding behind a false Islam.” Look at the Christian and Muslim leaders who came together in the Central African Republic to reject violence; listen to the imam who said, “Politics try to divide the religious in our country, but religion shouldn’t be a cause of hate, war, or strife.” We must address the cycle of conflict—especially sectarian conflict—that creates the conditions that terrorists prey upon. And it is time that political, civic, and religious leaders reject sectarian strife. These conflicts have created a fertile recruiting ground for terrorists who inevitably export this violence.²⁴⁴

Isolating or disparaging Muslims, suggesting that they should be treated differently when it comes to entering this country, that is not just a betrayal of our values, that’s not just a betrayal of who we are, it would alienate the very communities at home and abroad who are our most important partners in the fight against violent extremism.

We have reaffirmed again and again that the United States is not and never will be at war with Islam. Islam teaches peace. Muslims the world over aspire to live with dignity and a sense of justice. And *when it comes to America and Islam, there is no us and them, there is only us, because millions of*

A politics and solidarity that depend on demonizing others, that draws on religious sectarianism or narrow tribalism or jingoism, may at times look like strength in the moment, but over time its weakness will be exposed. And history tells us that the dark forces unleashed by this type of politics surely makes all of us less secure. Our world has been there before. We gain nothing from going back. Instead, I believe that we must go forward in pursuit of our ideals. – Barack Obama, Sept. 28, 2015

Muslim Americans are part of the fabric of our country. So we reject any suggestion of a clash of civilizations. And it is no exaggeration to say that humanity’s future depends on us uniting against those who would divide us along the fault lines of tribe or sect, race or religion.

But this is not simply a matter of words. Collectively, we must take concrete steps to address the danger posed by religiously motivated fanatics and the trends that fuel their recruitment.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ Sept. 24, 2014; Dec. 6, 2015.

²⁴⁴ Sept. 24, 2014.

²⁴⁵ May 15, 2016; Sept. 24, 2014.

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Terrorism

We continue to face a terrorist threat. We can't erase every trace of evil from the world, and small groups of killers have the capacity to do great harm. That was the case before 9/11, and that remains true today. And that's why we must remain vigilant as threats emerge. At this moment, the greatest threats come from the Middle East and North Africa, where radical groups exploit grievances for their own gain. And one of those groups is ISIL, which calls itself the "Islamic State." Let's be clear: ISIL is not Islamic. No religion condones the killing of innocents. And the vast majority of ISIL's victims have been Muslim. And ISIL is certainly not a state. It was formerly Al Qaida's affiliate in Iraq and has taken advantage of sectarian strife and Syria's civil war to gain territory on both sides of the Iraq-Syrian border. It is recognized by no government, nor by the people it subjugates. ISIL is a terrorist organization, pure and simple. And it has no vision other than the slaughter of all who stand in its way. In a region that has known so much bloodshed, these terrorists are unique in their brutality. *No God condones this. No grievance justifies these actions.*²⁴⁶

We counter terrorism not just through intelligence and military actions, but by remaining true to our constitutional ideals. – Barack Obama, Jan. 28, 2014

The world is, by most every measure, less violent than ever before, but it remains riven by old divisions and fresh hatreds. The world is more connected than ever before, but even as it spreads knowledge and the possibility of greater understanding between peoples, it also empowers terrorists who spread hatred and death. In today's world, even a handful of terrorists who place no value on human life can do a lot of damage. But as we focus on destroying ISIL, over-the-top claims that this is World War III just play into their hands. We cannot turn against one another by letting this fight be defined as a war between America and Islam. That too is what groups like ISIL want. The vast majority of terrorist victims around the world are Muslim. If we're to succeed in defeating terrorism, we must enlist Muslim communities as some of our strongest allies, rather than push them away through suspicion and hate.

We honor our ideals by upholding them not when it's easy, but when it is hard. – Barack Obama, Dec. 10, 2009

*We counter terrorism not just through intelligence and military actions, but by remaining true to our constitutional ideals. Terrorists cannot defeat America unless we betray our Constitution and our principles in the fight.*²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ Sept. 10, 2014; Sept. 24, 2014.

²⁴⁷ June 29, 2016; Jan. 12, 2016; Dec. 6, 2015; Jan. 28, 2014; Jan. 10, 2017.

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The effort to end conflicts around the world must begin with an unshakeable determination that the murder of innocent men, women, and children will never be tolerated. On this, there can be no dispute. The violent extremists who promote conflict by distorting faith have discredited and isolated themselves. They offer nothing but hatred and destruction. There is no excuse for terrorism against any nation. We must stand up to inhumanity in our midst.²⁴⁸

Our own safety, our own security, depends upon our willingness to do what it takes to defend this Nation and uphold the values that we stand for, timeless ideals that will endure long after those who offer only hate and destruction have been vanquished from the Earth. – Barack Obama, Sept. 10, 2014

Where a genuine civil society is allowed to flourish—where people can express their views and organize peacefully for a better life—then you dramatically expand the alternatives to terrorism. Programs to support entrepreneurship and civil society, education and youth—these investments are ultimately the best antidote to violence.

It is time for the world—especially Muslim communities—to explicitly, forcefully, and consistently reject the ideology of organizations like Al Qaida and ISIL. It is one of the tasks of all great religions to accommodate devout faith with a modern, multicultural world. *No children are born hating, and no children anywhere should be educated to hate other people.* There should be no more tolerance of so-called clerics who call upon people to harm innocents because they're Jewish or because they're Christian or because they're Muslim. It is time for a new compact among the civilized peoples of this world to eradicate war at its most fundamental source, and that is the corruption of young minds by violent ideology.

That means cutting off the funding that fuels this hate. It's time to end the hypocrisy of those who accumulate wealth through the global economy and then siphon funds to those who teach children to tear it down.

That means contesting the space that terrorists occupy, including the Internet and social media. Their propaganda has coerced young people to travel abroad to fight their wars and turned students—young people full of potential—into suicide bombers. We must offer an alternative vision.

It means bringing people of different faiths together. All religions have been attacked by extremists from within at some point, and all people of faith have a responsibility to lift up the value at the heart of all great religions: Do unto thy neighbor as you would have done unto yourself.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ Sept. 23, 2009; April 6, 2009; July 11, 2009.

²⁴⁹ Sept. 24, 2014.

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*Terrorists: You will never be strong enough to destroy America or our way of life. You are going to lose. Part of that is because we're on the right side of history, and part of it is because we can mobilize others to work with us. If you threaten America, you will find no safe haven. We have long memories, and our reach has no limits.*²⁵⁰

While Al Qaida seeks a religious war with the West, we must remember that they have killed thousands of Muslims—men, women, and children—around the globe. Our nations are not and will never be at war with Islam. Our fight is focused on defeating Al Qaida and its extremist allies. And as we fight an enemy that respects no law of war, we will continue to hold ourselves to a higher standard by living up to the values, the rule of law and due process that we so ardently defend.²⁵¹

We need not give in to fear every time a terrorist tries to scare us. Be vigilant, but not afraid. Al Qaida and its affiliates lead no nation; they lead no religion. We're more secure when we stand united against terrorist networks and ideologies.
– Barack Obama, May 22, 2010; Jan. 10, 2017; June 29, 2016

On September 11th, 2001, 19 men hijacked 4 airplanes and used them to murder nearly 3,000 people. They struck at our military and economic nerve centers. They took the lives of innocent men, women, and children without regard to their faith or race or station. Were it not for the heroic actions of passengers onboard one of these flights, they could have also struck at one of the great symbols of our democracy in Washington and killed many more.

As we know, these men belonged to Al Qaida, a group of extremists who have distorted and defiled Islam, one of the world's great religions, to justify the slaughter of innocents. Al Qaida's base of operations was in Afghanistan, where they were harbored by the Taliban, a ruthless, repressive, and radical movement that seized control of that country after it was ravaged by years of Soviet occupation and civil war and after the attention of America and our friends had turned elsewhere.

Just days after 9/11, Congress authorized the use of force against Al Qaida and those who harbored them. The vote in the Senate was 98 to nothing; the vote in the House was 420 to 1. For the first time in its history, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization invoked Article V, the commitment that says an attack on one member nation is an attack on all. And the United Nations Security Council endorsed the use of all necessary steps to respond to the 9/11 attacks. America,

²⁵⁰ June 2, 2016; Sept. 10, 2014; Jan. 12, 2016.

²⁵¹ May 25, 2011.

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our allies, and the world were acting as one to destroy Al Qaida's terrorist network and to protect our common security.

Under the banner of this domestic unity and international legitimacy—and only after the Taliban refused to turn over Usama bin Laden—we sent our troops into Afghanistan. Within a matter of months, Al Qaida was scattered and many of its operatives were killed. The Taliban was driven from power and pushed back on its heels. A place that had known decades of fear now had reason to hope.²⁵²

Tonight I can report to the American people and to the world that the United States has conducted an operation that killed Usama bin Laden, the leader of Al Qaida and a terrorist who's responsible for the murder of thousands of innocent men, women, and children.

It was nearly ten years ago that a bright September day was darkened by the worst attack on the American people since Pearl Harbor. The images of 9/11 are seared into our national memory: hijacked planes cutting through a cloudless September sky; the Twin Towers collapsing to the ground; black smoke billowing up from the Pentagon; the wreckage of Flight 93 in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, where the actions of heroic citizens saved even more heartbreak and destruction.

And yet we know that the worst images are those that were unseen to the world: the empty seat at the dinner table; children who were forced to grow up without their mother or their father; parents who would never know the feeling of their child's embrace; nearly 3,000 citizens taken from us, leaving a gaping hole in our hearts.

On September 11, 2001, in our time of grief, the American people came together. We offered our neighbors a hand, and we offered the wounded our blood. We reaffirmed our ties to each other and our love of community and country. On that day, no matter where we came from, what God we prayed to, or what race or ethnicity we were, we were united as one American family.²⁵³

Nearly ten years ago, America suffered the worst attack on our shores since Pearl Harbor. Today, as a new tower is rising at Ground Zero, it symbolizes New York's renewal. – Barack Obama, June 22, 2011; Sept. 21, 2011

The future must belong to those who create, not those who destroy. – Barack Obama, April 6, 2009

²⁵² Dec. 1, 2009.

²⁵³ May 1, 2011; June 22, 2011.

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Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)

True security will never come from an endless race for evermore destructive weapons. To lift the specter of mass destruction, we must come together to pursue the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. If countries continue down a path that is outside international law, they must be met with greater pressure and isolation. That is what our commitment to peace and security demands.²⁵⁴

We must stop the spread of nuclear weapons, and seek the goal of a world without them. The United Nations was founded at the dawn of the atomic age, in part because man's capacity to kill had to be contained. For decades, we averted disaster, even under the shadow of a superpower standoff. But today, the threat of proliferation is growing in scope and complexity. If we fail to act, we will invite nuclear arms races in every region and the prospect of wars and acts of terrorism on a scale that we can hardly imagine.

A fragile consensus stands in the way of this frightening outcome, and that is the basic bargain that shapes the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). It says that all nations have the right to peaceful nuclear energy, that nations with nuclear weapons have a responsibility to move toward disarmament, and those without them have the responsibility to forsake them. When the prohibition on nuclear weapons is strengthened, a potential war is averted, and our world is safer. That is the strength of the international system when it works the way it should.²⁵⁵

Because chemical weapons can kill on a mass scale, with no distinction between soldier and infant, the civilized world has spent a century working to ban them. And in 1997, the United States Senate overwhelmingly approved an international agreement prohibiting the use of chemical weapons, now joined by 189 governments that represent 98 percent of humanity.

If the ban against chemical weapons erodes, tyrants will have no reason to think twice about acquiring poison gas and using them. Over time, our troops would again face the prospect of chemical warfare on the battlefield. And it could be easier for terrorist organizations to obtain these weapons and to use them to attack civilians. And a failure to stand against the use of chemical weapons would weaken prohibitions against other weapons of mass destruction and embolden tyrants. This is not a world we should accept.²⁵⁶

What kind of world will we live in if the United States of America sees a dictator brazenly violate international law with poison gas and we choose to look the other way? – Barack Obama, Sept. 10, 2013

²⁵⁴ Dec. 1, 2009; Sept. 21, 2011.

²⁵⁵ Sept. 23, 2009; Sept. 28, 2015.

²⁵⁶ Sept. 10, 2013.

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War

I come here with an acute sense of the costs of armed conflict, filled with difficult questions about the relationship between war and peace and our effort to replace one with the other. Now, these questions are not new. War, in one form or another, appeared with the first man. At the dawn of history, its morality was not questioned; it was simply a fact, like drought or disease, the manner in which tribes and then civilizations sought power and settled their differences.

And over time, as codes of law sought to control violence within groups, so did philosophers and clerics and statesmen seek to regulate the destructive power of war. The concept of a just war emerged, suggesting that war is justified only when certain conditions were met: if it is waged as a last resort or in self-defense; if the force used is proportional; and if, whenever possible, civilians are spared from violence.

Of course, we know that for most of history, this concept of just war was rarely observed. The capacity of human beings to think of new ways to kill one another proved inexhaustible, as did our capacity to exempt from mercy those who look different or pray to a different God. Wars between armies gave way to wars between nations, total wars, in which the distinction between combatant and civilian became blurred. In the span of 30 years, such carnage would twice engulf Europe. And while it's hard to conceive of a cause more just than the defeat of the Third Reich and the Axis powers, World War II was a conflict in which the total number of civilians who died exceeded the number of soldiers who perished.

In the wake of such destruction and with the advent of the nuclear age, it became clear to victor and vanquished alike that the world needed institutions to prevent another world war. And so a quarter century after the United States Senate rejected the League of Nations—an idea for which Woodrow Wilson received this prize [the Nobel Peace Prize]—America led the world in constructing an architecture to keep the peace: a Marshall Plan and a United Nations, mechanisms to govern the waging of war, treaties to protect human rights, prevent genocide, restrict the most dangerous weapons.

In many ways, these efforts succeeded. Yes, terrible wars have been fought and atrocities committed. But there has been no third world war. The Cold War ended with jubilant crowds dismantling a wall. Commerce has stitched much of the world together. Billions have been lifted from poverty. The ideals of liberty and self-determination, equality and the rule of law have haltingly advanced. We are the heirs of the fortitude and foresight of generations past, and it is a legacy for which my own country is rightfully proud.

And yet, a decade into a new century, this old architecture is buckling under the weight of new threats. The world may no longer shudder at the prospect of war between two nuclear superpowers, but proliferation may increase the risk of catastrophe. Terrorism has long been a tactic, but modern technology allows a few with outsized rage to murder innocents on a horrific scale.

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Moreover, wars between nations have increasingly given way to wars within nations. The resurgence of ethnic or sectarian conflicts, the growth of secessionist movements, insurgencies, and failed states, all these things have increasingly trapped civilians in unending chaos. In today's wars, many more civilians are killed than soldiers, the seeds of future conflict are sown, economies are wrecked, civil societies torn asunder, refugees amassed, children scarred.

There will be times when nations, acting individually or in concert, will find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified. I make this statement mindful of what Martin Luther King, Jr., said in this same ceremony years ago: "Violence never brings permanent peace. It solves no social problem: it merely creates new and more complicated ones." As someone who stands here as a direct consequence of Dr. King's life work, I am living testimony to the moral force of nonviolence. I know there's nothing weak, nothing passive, nothing naive in the creed and lives of Gandhi and King.

But as a head of state sworn to protect and defend my nation, I cannot be guided by their examples alone. I face the world as it is and cannot stand idle in the face of threats to the American people. For make no mistake: Evil does exist in the world. A nonviolent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies. Negotiations cannot convince Al Qaida's leaders to lay down their arms. To say that force may sometimes be necessary is not a call to cynicism; it is a recognition of history, the imperfections of man, and the limits of reason.

Yet it was not simply international institutions, not just treaties and declarations that brought stability to a post-World War II world. Whatever mistakes we have made, the plain fact is this: The United States of America has helped underwrite global security for more than six decades with the blood of our citizens and the strength of our arms. The service and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform has promoted peace and prosperity from Germany to Korea and enabled democracy to take hold in places like the Balkans. We have borne this burden not because we seek to impose our will. We have done so out of enlightened self-interest, because we seek a better future for our children and grandchildren, and we believe that their lives will be better if others' children and grandchildren can live in freedom and prosperity.

So yes, the instruments of war do have a role to play in preserving the peace. And yet this truth must coexist with another: That no matter how justified, war promises human tragedy. The soldier's courage and sacrifice are full of glory, expressing devotion to country, to cause, to comrades-in-arms. But war itself is never glorious, and we must never trumpet it as such.

So part of our challenge is reconciling these two seemingly irreconcilable truths: That war is sometimes necessary, and war at some level is an expression of human folly.²⁵⁷

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²⁵⁷ Dec. 10, 2009.

Peace

The pursuit of peace. *The United Nations was born of the belief that the people of the world can live their lives, raise their families, and resolve their differences peacefully. At the heart of the United Nations is the pursuit of peace in an imperfect world.* War and conflict have been with us since the beginning of civilizations. But in the first part of the 20th century, the advance of modern weaponry led to death on a staggering scale. It was this killing that compelled the founders of this body to build an institution that was focused not just on ending one war, but on averting others; a union of sovereign states that would seek to prevent conflict, while also addressing its causes.

We've got to have the realism to see the world as it is: where sometimes uncomfortable compromises are necessary. But we also need the idealism that sees the world as it ought to be: a commitment to the universal values of democracy and equality and human rights and a willingness to stand up for them around the world, not just when it's easy, but when it's hard. – Barack Obama, June 2, 2016

No American did more to pursue this objective than President Franklin Roosevelt. He knew that a victory in war was not enough. As he said at one of the very first meetings on the founding of the United Nations, “We have got to make not merely peace, but a peace that will last.”

Peace is hard work. If it were easy, it would have been accomplished by now. Peace is hard, but we know that it is possible. Even the most intractable conflicts can be resolved. So, together, let us be resolved to see that it is defined by our hopes and not by our fears. Together, let us make peace, but a peace, most importantly, that will last.²⁵⁸

Peace is not merely the absence of visible conflict. Only a just peace based on the inherent rights and dignity of every individual can truly be lasting. It was this insight that drove the drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights after the Second World War. In the wake of devastation, they recognized that if human rights are not protected, peace is a hollow promise.²⁵⁹

Conflicts are a millstone and we must work together to avert war. Peace is more than just the absence of war. A lasting peace—for nations and for individuals—depends on a sense of justice and opportunity, of dignity and freedom. It depends on struggle and sacrifice, on compromise, and on a sense of common humanity.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ Sept. 23, 2009; Sept. 21, 2011; June 29, 2016.

²⁵⁹ Dec. 10, 2009.

²⁶⁰ July 11, 2009; June 29, 2016; Sept. 21, 2011.

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Our efforts to promote peace cannot be limited to defeating violent extremists. For *the most powerful weapon in our arsenal is the hope of human beings, the belief that the future belongs to those who would build and not destroy, the confidence that conflicts can end and a new day can begin.*²⁶¹

The belief that peace is desirable is rarely enough to achieve it. *Peace requires responsibility*; peace entails sacrifice. That's why NATO continues to be indispensable. That's why we must strengthen U.N. and regional peacekeeping and not leave the task to a few countries. That's why we honor those who return home from peacekeeping and training abroad to Oslo and Rome, to Ottawa and Sydney, to Dhaka and Kigali. We honor them not as makers of war, but as wagers of peace.²⁶²

We honor peacekeepers as wagers of peace. – Barack Obama, Dec. 10, 2009

There is no shortcut to the end of a conflict that has endured for decades. This U.N. body—founded, as it was, out of the ashes of war and genocide, dedicated, as it is, to the dignity of every single person—must recognize the reality that is lived by both the Palestinians and the Israelis. The measure of our actions must always be whether they advance the right of Israeli and Palestinian children to live lives of peace and security and dignity and opportunity. And we will only succeed in that effort if we can encourage the parties to sit down, to listen to each other, and to understand each other's hopes and each other's fears. There are no shortcuts. When each side has legitimate aspirations, is part of what makes peace so hard. And the deadlock will only be broken when each side learns to stand in the other's shoes, and each side can see the world through the other's eyes. That's what we should be encouraging. That's what we should be promoting.

After thousands of years, Jews and Arabs are not strangers in a strange land. This time, we should draw upon the teachings of tolerance that lie at the heart of three great religions that see Jerusalem's soil as sacred. This time, we should reach for what's best within ourselves. If we do, when we come back here next year, we can have an agreement that will lead to a new member of the United Nations, an independent, sovereign state of Palestine, living in peace with Israel.

We must remember that the greatest price of this conflict is not paid by us. It's not paid by politicians. It's paid by the Israeli girl in Sderot who closes her eyes in fear that a rocket will take her life in the middle of the night. It's paid for by the Palestinian boy in Gaza who has no clean water and no country to call his own. These are all God's children. And after all the politics and all the posturing, this is about the right of every human being to live with dignity and security. That is a lesson embedded in the three great faiths that call one small slice of Earth the Holy Land.²⁶³

²⁶¹ Sept. 23, 2009.

²⁶² Dec. 10, 2009.

²⁶³ Sept. 21, 2011; Sept. 23, 2010; Sept. 23, 2009.

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The choices of individual human beings have led to repeated world war. But we also have to remember that the choices of individual human beings created a United Nations so that a war like that would never happen again. Each of us as leaders, each nation, can choose to reject those who appeal to our worst impulses and embrace those who appeal to our best. For we have shown that we can choose a better history.²⁶⁴

We stand at a crossroads of history with the chance to move decisively in the direction of peace. – Barack Obama, Sept. 21, 2011

Peace is hard work. If it were easy, it would have been accomplished by now. Peace is hard, but we know that it is possible. Even the most intractable conflicts can be resolved. Together, let us make peace, but a peace, most importantly, that will last. – Barack Obama, Sept. 21, 2011; June 29, 2016

We are blessed to be living in the most peaceful, most prosperous era in human history. Now, that sounds controversial until you survey the history of the world. It's hard to see with all the violence and suffering in the world and what's reported on the news every day. But if you step back for a moment, think about last week when I was in Hiroshima, to remember all who were lost in a World War that killed some 60 million people—not 60,000, 60 million. For decades, there have been no wars between major powers. Wars between nations are increasingly rare. More people live in democracies. More than one billion people have been lifted from extreme poverty. From the Americas to Africa to Southeast Asia, there's a new generation of young people, connected by technology and ready to make their mark. I've met them. They look up to America. They aspire to be our partner. That's the progress and the hope that we have to build on.²⁶⁵

We can understand that there will be war and still strive for peace. We can do that, for that is the story of human progress. That's the hope of all the world, and at this moment of challenge, that must be our work here on Earth. – Barack Obama, Dec. 10, 2009

A lasting peace—for nations and for individuals—depends on a sense of justice and opportunity, of dignity and freedom. It depends on struggle and sacrifice, on compromise, and on a sense of common humanity. – Barack Obama, Sept. 21, 2011

²⁶⁴ Sept. 20, 2016.

²⁶⁵ June 2, 2016.

VI. To Young People

Pursuing Your Goals

Aim for True Success

You come of an age in a popular culture that reinforces an approach to life. You watch TV, and basically, what it says is you can be rich and successful without much effort; you just have to become a celebrity. If you can achieve some reality TV notoriety, that's better than lasting achievement. We live in a culture that tells you there's a quick fix for every problem and a justification for every selfish desire. And all of you were raised with cellphones and iPods and texting and emails, and you're able to call up a fact or a song or a friend with the click of a button. So you're used to instant gratification.

But meaningful achievement, lasting success, doesn't happen in an instant. It's not about luck. It's not about a sudden stroke of genius. It's not usually about talent. It's usually about daily effort, the large choices and the small choices that you make that add up over time. *I believe that it was small victories that helped me win the bigger victories of my years as President.*²⁶⁶

As you think about life after graduation, as you look into the mirror tonight after the partying is done—[*applause*]*—*that shouldn't get such a big cheer—[*laughter*]*—*you may look in the mirror tonight, and you may see somebody who's not really sure what to do with your life. That's what you may see, but a troubled child might look at you and see a mentor, a homebound senior citizen might see a lifeline, the folks at your local homeless shelter might see a friend. None of them care how much money is in your bank account or whether you're important at work or whether you're famous around town; they just know that you're somebody who cares, somebody who makes a difference in their lives.

So that's what building a body of work is all about. It's about the daily labor, the many individual acts, the choices large and small that add up over time, over a lifetime, to a lasting legacy. That's what you want on your tombstone. It's about not being satisfied with the latest achievement, the latest gold star, because the one thing I know about a body of work is that it's never finished. It's cumulative; it deepens and expands with each day that you give your best, each day that you give back and contribute to the life of your community and your nation.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ June 7, 2010; May 14, 2012.

²⁶⁷ May 13, 2009.

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It may be tempting to fall back on the formulas for success that have been peddled so frequently in recent years. It goes something like this: You're taught to chase after all the usual brass rings; you try to be on this who's who list or that top 100 list; you chase after the big money and you figure out how big your corner office is; you worry about whether you have a fancy enough title or a fancy enough car. That's the message that's sent each and every day, or what has been in our culture for far too long, that through material possessions, through a ruthless competition pursued only on your own behalf, that's how you will measure success. But such an

Your success in life won't be determined just by what's given to you or what happens to you, but by what you do with all that's given to you, what you do with all that happens to you, how hard you try, how far you push yourself, how high you're willing to reach.
– Barack Obama, June 7, 2010

approach displays a poverty of ambition, in fact, the elevation of appearance over substance, of celebrity over character, of short-term gains over lasting achievement is precisely what your generation needs to help end.

I want to highlight two main problems with that old, tired, me-first approach to life. First of all, it distracts you from what's truly important, and it may lead you to compromise your values and your principles and commitments. It's in chasing titles and status, in worrying about the next election rather than the national interest and the interests of those who you're supposed to represent that politicians so often lose their way in Washington. They spend time thinking about polls but not about principle. It was in pursuit of gaudy, short-term profits and the bonuses that came with them that so many folks lost their way on Wall Street, engaging in extraordinary risks with other people's money.

In contrast, the leaders we revere, the businesses and institutions that last, are not generally the result of a narrow pursuit of popularity or personal advancement, but of devotion to some bigger purpose: the preservation of the Union or the determination to lift a country out of a depression; the creation of a quality product; a commitment to your customers, your workers, your shareholders, and your community; a commitment to make sure that an institution is inclusive and diverse and giving opportunity to all. That's the hallmark of real success.

The most successful CEOs I know didn't start out intent just on making money; rather, they had a vision of how their product or service would change things, and the money followed. – Barack Obama, May 19, 2013

That other stuff, *the trappings of success may be a byproduct of this larger mission, but it can't be the central thing*—just ask Bernie Madoff. That's the first problem with the old attitude.

The second problem with the old approach to success is that a relentless focus on the outward markers of success can lead to complacency. It can make you lazy. We too often let the external, the material things, serve as indicators that we're doing well, even though something inside us tells us that we're not doing our best;

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that we're avoiding that which is hard but also necessary; that we're shrinking from, rather than rising to the challenges of the age. And the thing is, in this new, hyper-competitive age, none of us—none of us can afford to be complacent.

And this is not just true for individuals; it's also true for this Nation. In recent years, in many ways, we've become enamored with our own past success, lulled into complacency by the glitter of our own achievements. We've become accustomed to the title of "military superpower," forgetting the qualities that got us there, not just the power of our weapons, but the discipline and valor and the code of conduct of our men and women in uniform. The Marshall Plan and the Peace Corps and all those initiatives that show our commitment to working with other nations to pursue the ideals of opportunity and equality and freedom that have made us who we are, that's what made us a superpower.

The leaders we revere, the businesses and institutions that last, are not generally the result of a narrow pursuit of popularity or personal advancement, but of devotion to some bigger purpose. That's the hallmark of real success. – Barack Obama, May 13, 2009

I'm talking about an approach to life, a quality of mind and quality of heart; a willingness to follow your passions, regardless of whether they lead to fortune and fame; a willingness to question conventional wisdom and rethink old dogmas; a lack of regard for all the traditional markers of status and prestige, and a commitment instead to doing what's meaningful to you, what helps others, what makes a difference in this world.²⁶⁸

It betrays a poverty of ambition if all you think about is what goods you can buy instead of what good you can do.
– Barack Obama, May 19, 2013

Believe in yourselves and in one another, and above all, when life gets you down or somebody tells you you can't do something, continue to believe in something better. Don't let resistance make you cynical. Cynicism is so easy, and cynics don't accomplish much. Cynicism has never won a war or cured a disease or started a business or fed a young mind or sent men into space. *Cynicism is a choice. Hope is a better choice.* What keeps me going, what keeps me fighting, is that despite setbacks, that spirit of determination and optimism, that fundamental decency that has always been at the core of the American people, lives on.²⁶⁹

Go forward with the confidence that right makes might. – Barack Obama, Dec. 1, 2009

²⁶⁸ May 13, 2009.

²⁶⁹ June 14, 2014; May 15, 2016; Jan. 27, 2010.

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Use Opportunities and Education

Education made all the difference in my life. The same is true for Michelle; education made such a difference in her life. And it's going to make an even greater difference in your lives, not just for your own success, but for the success of the United States of America. Because we live in a new world now. Through education, you can also better yourselves in other ways. You learn how to learn, how to think critically and find solutions to unexpected challenges. I remember, we used to ask our teachers, "Why am I going to need algebra?" Well, you may not have to solve for x to get a good job or to be a good parent, but you will need to think through tough problems. You'll need to think on your feet. You'll need to know how to gather facts and evaluate information. So, math teachers, you can tell your students that the President says they need algebra. [*Laughter*]

Education also teaches you the value of discipline, that the greatest rewards come not from instant gratification, but from sustained effort and from hard work. This is a lesson that's especially true today, in a culture that prizes flash over substance, that tells us that the goal in life is to be entertained, that says you can be famous just for being famous. I mean, you get on a reality show, don't know what you've done, suddenly, you're famous. But that's not going to lead to lasting, sustained achievement.

And finally, with the right education, both at home and at school, you can learn how to be a better human being. For when you read a great story or you learn about an important moment in history, it helps you imagine what it would be like to walk in somebody else's shoes, to know their struggles. *The success of our economy will depend on your skills, but the success of our community will depend on your ability to follow the Golden Rule, to treat others as you would like to be treated.*

Dropping out of high school is not just quitting on yourself, it's quitting on your country, and this country needs and values the talents of every American.
– Barack Obama, Feb. 24, 2009

All of these qualities—empathy, discipline, the capacity to solve problems, the capacity to think critically—these skills don't just change how the world sees us, they change how we see ourselves. They allow each of us to seek out new horizons and new opportunities with confidence, with the knowledge that we're ready, that we can face obstacles and challenges and unexpected setbacks. That's the power of your education.²⁷⁰

²⁷⁰ May 16, 2011.

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What I enjoy most about this job is having a chance to come to a school like Booker T. Washington High School and share this day with its graduates. So I could not be more pleased to be here.

Just a couple of years ago, this was a school where only about half the students made it to graduation. For a long time, just a handful headed to college each year. But at Booker T. Washington, you changed all that.

You created special academies for ninth graders to start students off on the right track. You made it possible for kids to take AP classes and earn college credits. You even had a team take part in robotics competition so students can learn with their hands by building and creating. And you didn't just create a new curriculum, you created a new culture, a culture that prizes hard work and discipline, a culture that shows every student here that they matter and that their teachers believe in them.

And because you created this culture of caring and learning, today we're standing with a very different Booker T. Washington High School. Today this is a place where more than four out of five students are earning a diploma, a place where 70 percent of the graduates will continue their education, where many will be the very first in their families to go to college.

Today Booker T. Washington is a place that has proven why we can't accept excuses—any excuses—when it comes to education. In the United States of America, we should never accept anything less than the best that our children have to offer.

As your teacher Steve McKinney said in the local paper, "We need everyone to broaden their ideas about what is possible. We need parents, politicians, and the media to see how success is possible, how success is happening every day."

I think of a friend of mine who's the daughter of immigrants. When she was in high school, her guidance counselor told her, you know what, you're just not college material. You should think about becoming a secretary. Well, she was stubborn, so she went to college anyway. She got her master's. She ran for local office, won. She ran for State office, she won. She ran for Congress, she won. And lo and behold, Hilda Solis did end up becoming a secretary. She is America's Secretary of Labor. – Barack Obama, May 14, 2012

So that's why I came here today. Because if success can happen here at Booker T. Washington, it can happen anywhere in Memphis. And if it can happen in Memphis, it can happen anywhere in Tennessee. And if it can happen anywhere in Tennessee, it can happen all across America.²⁷¹

²⁷¹ May 16, 2011.

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Today, in every phone in one of your pockets we have access to more information than at any time in human history, at a touch of a button. You're coming of age in a 24/7 media environment that bombards us with all kinds of content and exposes us to all kinds of arguments, some of which don't always rank that high on the truth meter. And with iPods and iPads and Xboxes and PlayStations—none of which I know how to work—[laughter]—*information becomes a distraction, a diversion, a form of entertainment, rather than a tool of empowerment, rather than the means of emancipation. So all of this is not only putting pressure on you, it's putting new pressure on our country and on our democracy.*

This is a period of breathtaking change, like few others in our history. We can't stop these changes, but we can channel them, we can shape them, we can adapt to them. And education is what can allow us to do so. *It can fortify you, as it did earlier generations, to meet the tests of your own time.*²⁷²

Seek to expand your intellectual and social exposure. Don't just hang out with people who look like you or go to the same church you do or share your political views. Broaden your circle to include people with different backgrounds and life experiences. Because *that's how you'll end up learning what it's like to walk in somebody else's shoes.* That's how you'll come to understand the challenges other people

Whereas most Americans used to get their news from the same three networks over dinner or a few influential papers on Sunday morning, we now have the option to get our information from any number of blogs or websites or cable news shows. And this can have both a good and bad development for democracy. For if we choose only to expose ourselves to opinions and viewpoints that are in line with our own, studies suggest that we become more polarized, more set in our ways. That will only reinforce and even deepen the political divides in this country.
– Barack Obama, May 1, 2010

face. And this is not just an academic exercise. It's a way to broaden your ambit of concern and learn to see yourselves in each other.²⁷³

Education can fortify you, as it did earlier generations, to meet the tests of your own time. Just as your education can fortify you, it can also fortify our Nation as a whole. The recognition—that truth—that an education can fortify us to rise above any barrier, to meet any test, is reflected again and again throughout our history. – Barack Obama, May 9, 2010

²⁷² May 15, 2016; May 9, 2010.

²⁷³ June 7, 2010.

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Persevere

*We have the power to grow from difficult experiences. It's moments like these that force us to try harder and dig deeper and to discover gifts we never knew we had, to find the greatness that lies within each of us. So don't ever shy away from that endeavor. Don't stop adding to your body of work. I can promise that you will be the better for that continued effort, as will this Nation that we all love. We can define our lives not by what happens to us, but by how we respond. We can choose to carry on. We can choose to make a difference in the world.*²⁷⁴

At the U.S. Naval Academy, Brad Snyder was the captain of the swim team. He deployed to Afghanistan, and while rushing to the aid of his teammates, he stepped on an IED and lost both his eyes. With the support of family and friends, Brad learned to feel his way and move again. And before long, he was back in the swimming pool, where he said, "I'm free." Then, just one year later, Brad competed at the London Paralympics and won three medals, including two golds. And when Michelle and I welcomed our U.S. Olympians to the White House, Brad joined us standing tall, right in front. And he said: "*Overcoming adversity is a decision. You can let that beat you, or you can make the decision to move forward.*"

Matt Lampert deployed to Afghanistan with his Marine special ops team. And as they entered a compound, an IED exploded, and Matt lost both his legs. He endured a long and painful recovery. But with his new legs, he learned to walk again. He practiced, he trained, and then, he passed his physical tests and deployed to Afghanistan again, a double amputee, back in the fight. And Matt recently completed his tour. He is back home and is looking ahead to many years of service. Reflecting on his journey—his mission to return to his unit—he said he was determined, "however long it was going to take."²⁷⁵

In 1921, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, when Dr. Olivia Hooker was just six years old, her African American community was attacked by White mobs. It was a horrific racial incident. And hundreds of innocent African Americans were killed. The mobs destroyed her father's clothing store. They looted her house. They even burned the little clothes for her doll.

And Olivia could have given in to bitterness. She could have been pessimistic about her country. Instead, she made it better. So, in World War II, she enlisted as a SPAR, becoming the first African American woman in the Coast Guard. As a yeoman in Boston, she served with distinction. By the time the war was won and she was discharged, she was a petty officer second class. With the GI bill, Olivia

²⁷⁴ May 21, 2012; May 13, 2009.

²⁷⁵ May 24, 2013.

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earned her master's, then her doctorate. She has been a professor and mentor to her students, a passionate advocate for Americans with disabilities, a psychologist counseling young children, a caregiver at the height of the AIDS epidemic, a tireless voice for justice and equality. And a few months ago, Olivia turned a hundred years old. In Yonkers, New York, she even still volunteers as a member of the Coast Guard Auxiliary and was determined to be here with us today. So, Dr. Hooker, thank you. You're an inspiration. Hundred years old. So Dr. Hooker has led a remarkable life. But this is what she says: "*It's not about you or me. It's about what we can give to this world.*"²⁷⁶

It's tempting to look back and assume that our progress was inevitable, that America was always destined to succeed. But when the Union was turned back at Bull Run and the Allies first landed at Omaha Beach, victory was very much in doubt. When the market crashed on Black Tuesday and marchers were beaten on Bloody Sunday, the future was anything but certain. These were the times that tested the courage of our convictions and the strength of our Union. And despite all our divisions and disagreements, our hesitations and our fears, America prevailed because we chose to move forward as one Nation, as one people. Again, we are tested. And again, we must answer history's call.²⁷⁷

Don't make excuses. Take responsibility not just for your successes, take responsibility where you fall short as well. Now, the truth is, no matter how hard you work, there will be times where you make a mistake. And when that happens, it's the easiest thing in the world to start looking around for somebody else to blame. Your professor was too hard; your boss was a jerk; the coaches were playing favorites; your friend just didn't understand.

This is an easy habit to get into. You see it every day in Washington—every day—folks calling each other names, making all sorts of accusations on television. Everybody is always pointing a finger at somebody else. You notice that?

Now, this community [in Kalamazoo, Michigan] could have easily gone down that road. This community could have made excuses: Well, our kids have fewer advantages, our schools have fewer resources, how can we compete? You could have spent years pointing fingers, blaming parents, blaming teachers, blaming the principal, blaming the superintendent, blaming the President. [*Laughter*]

But, class of 2010, I want you to pay attention on this because that's not what happened. Instead, this community was honest with itself about where you were falling short. You resolved to do better, push your kids harder, open their minds wider, expose them to all kinds of ideas and people and experiences. So, graduates, I hope you'll continue those efforts.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁶ May 20, 2015.

²⁷⁷ Jan. 27, 2010.

²⁷⁸ June 7, 2010.

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Your success in life won't be determined just by what's given to you or what happens to you, but by what you do with all that's given to you, what you do with all that happens to you, how hard you try, how far you push yourself, how high you're willing to reach. True excellence only comes with perseverance.

Gear yourself for the long haul. Whatever path you choose—business, nonprofits, government, education, healthcare, the arts—whatever it is, you're going to have some setbacks. You will deal occasionally with foolish people. You will be frustrated. You'll have a boss who's not great. You won't always get everything you want, at least not as fast as you want it. So you have to stick with it. You have to be persistent. And success, however small, however incomplete, success is still success. So don't lose hope if sometimes you hit a roadblock. Don't lose hope in the face of naysayers.

When things are difficult, think back to this moment to what you feel in your hearts today.
– Barack Obama, May 20, 2015

I wish I could say that perseverance came from some innate toughness in me. But the truth is, it was learned. I got it from watching the people who raised me. My grandmother only had a high school education. She got a job at a local bank. She hit the glass ceiling and watched men she once trained promoted up the ladder ahead of her. But she didn't quit. Rather than grow hard or angry each time she got passed over, she kept doing her job as best as she knew how and ultimately ended up being vice president at the bank. She didn't quit.

I believe that it was small victories that helped me win the bigger victories of my last 3 1/2 years as President. – Barack Obama, May 14, 2012

People ask me sometimes, who inspires you, Mr. President? Those quiet heroes all across this country—some of your parents and grandparents who are sitting here—no fanfare, no articles written about them, they just persevere. They just do their jobs. They meet their responsibilities. They don't quit. I'm only here because of them. They may not have set out to change the world, but in small, important ways, they did. They certainly changed mine.²⁷⁹

Persevere. A British inventor named James Dyson went through more than 5,000 prototypes before getting that first really fancy vacuum cleaner just right. We remember Michael Jordan's 6 championships; we don't remember his nearly 15,000 missed shots. As for me, *I lost my first race for Congress, and look at me now: I'm an honorary graduate of the Ohio State University.*²⁸⁰

I lost my first race for Congress, and look at me now: I'm an honorary graduate of the Ohio State University. – Barack Obama, May 5, 2013

²⁷⁹ June 7, 2010; May 15, 2016; May 14, 2012.

²⁸⁰ May 5, 2013.

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You have to go through life with more than just passion for change, you need a strategy. I'll repeat that: I want you to have passion; you have to have a strategy. Not just awareness, but action. Not just hashtags, but votes. You see, change requires more than righteous anger. It requires a program, and it requires organizing. At the 1964 Democratic Convention, Fannie Lou Hamer—5 feet 4 inches tall—gave a fiery speech on the national stage. But then, she went back home to Mississippi and organized cotton pickers. And she didn't have the tools and technology where you can whip up a movement in minutes. To bring about structural change, lasting change, awareness is not enough. It requires changes in law, changes in custom. Mobilize the community, present them with a plan, work with them to bring about change.²⁸¹

The forces of change cannot be reversed. Change will be a constant, just as it has been throughout our history. And yes, we still face many important challenges. Some will require technological breakthroughs or new policy insights. But more than anything, what we will need is political will: to harness the ingenuity of your generation and encourage and inspire the hard work of dedicated citizens. All of this is going to happen if you are involved, because it takes dogged determination, the dogged determination of our citizens.²⁸²

You can't give up your passion if things don't work right away. You can't lose heart or grow cynical if there are twists and turns on your journey. The cynics may be the loudest voices, but I promise you, they will accomplish the least. It's those folks who stay at it, those who do the long, hard, committed work of change that gradually push this country in the right direction and make the most lasting difference. So whenever you feel that creeping cynicism, whenever you hear those voices saying you can't do it, you can't make a difference, whenever somebody tells you to set your sights lower, the trajectory of this great Nation should give you hope. What generations have done before you should give you hope. There were those who fought to secure rights and opportunities for others, *even if their rights were already secured*. And that should give you some hope. I wish you courage and compassion and all the strength that you will need.²⁸³

When your journey seems too hard, and when you run into a chorus of cynics who tell you that you're being foolish to keep believing or that you can't do something or that you should just give up or you should just settle, you might say to yourself a little phrase that I've found handy these last eight years: Yes, we can. – Barack Obama, May 7, 2016

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²⁸¹ May 7, 2016.

²⁸² Jan. 24, 2012; May 5, 2013.

²⁸³ May 5, 2013.

A Better Future

Make a Better America

If you want to make life fair, then you've got to start with the world as it is. The size and scope of the challenges before us require that we remake our world to renew its promise, that we align our deepest values and commitments to the demands of a new age. When times change, so must we: Fidelity to our founding principles requires new responses to new challenges, and preserving our individual freedoms ultimately requires collective action.²⁸⁴

On the last day of the Constitutional Convention, Benjamin Franklin was famously asked, "Well, Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?" And Franklin gave an answer that's been quoted for ages. He said, "A republic, if you can keep it." *If you can keep it.* Well, for more than 200 years, we have kept it. Through revolution and civil war, our democracy has survived. Through depression and world war, it has prevailed. Through periods of great social and economic unrest, from civil rights to women's rights, it has allowed us slowly, sometimes painfully, to move towards a more perfect Union. And so now the question for your generation is this: How will you keep our democracy going? How will you keep it well in this century?²⁸⁵

Dr. Martin Luther King was just 15 years old when he enrolled here at Morehouse College. But his education at Morehouse helped to forge the intellect, the discipline, the compassion, the *soul force* that would transform America. It was here that he was introduced to the writings of Gandhi and Thoreau and the theory of civil disobedience. It was at Morehouse that professors encouraged him to *look past the world as it was and fight for the world as it should be*. Sitting in a prison cell, a young Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote that "Human progress never rolls on the wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be *coworkers with God*."²⁸⁶

The truth is, our Nation's destiny has never been certain. What is certain, what has always been certain, is the ability to shape that destiny. – Barack Obama, May 1, 2010

During the course of these eight years, as I've traveled to many nations, I have seen the spirit of young people, who are more educated and more tolerant and

²⁸⁴ May 7, 2016; May 17, 2009; Jan. 21, 2013.

²⁸⁵ May 1, 2010.

²⁸⁶ May 19, 2013; Sept. 20, 2016.

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more inclusive and more diverse and more creative than our generation; who are more empathetic and compassionate towards their fellow human beings than previous generations. And yes, some of that comes with the idealism of youth. But it also comes with young people's access to information about other peoples and places, an understanding unique in human history that their future is bound with the fates of other human beings on the other side of the world.²⁸⁷

In 2014, only 36 percent of Americans turned out to vote in the midterms: second lowest participation rate on record. *Youth turnout was less than 20 percent. Less than 20 percent.* Four out of five did not vote. *In 2012, nearly two in three African-Americans turned out. And then, in 2014, only two in five turned out. You don't think that made a difference in terms of the Congress I've got to deal with? And then, people are wondering, well, how come Obama hasn't gotten this done? How come he didn't get that done? You don't think that made a difference? What would have happened if you had turned out at 50, 60, 70 percent, all across this country? People try to make this political thing really complicated. Like, well, what kinds of reforms do we need? And how do we need to do that, and what? You know what, just vote.*

And you [young Blacks] don't have excuses. You don't have to guess the number of jellybeans in a jar or bubbles on a bar of soap to register to vote. You don't have to risk your life to cast a ballot. Other people already did that for you. Your grandparents, your great-grandparents. What's your excuse? *When we don't vote, we give away our power, disenfranchise ourselves, right when we need to use the power that we have, right when we need your power to stop others from taking away the vote and rights of those more vulnerable than you are: the elderly and the poor, the formerly incarcerated trying to earn their second chance.*

So you've got to vote all the time, not just when it's cool, not just when it's time to elect a President, not just when you're inspired. It's

<p><i>Change we can believe in.</i> – Barack Obama, Jan. 27, 2010</p>

your duty. When it's time to elect a Member of Congress or a city councilman or a school board member or a sheriff. That's how we change our politics; by electing people at every level who are representative of and accountable to us.²⁸⁸

Let me begin by saying all of you had the inside track in getting me here, because my personal assistant, Ferial, is a proud Anteanter. Now, in addition to Ferial, graduates, I'm here for a simple reason: You asked. For those who don't know, the UC Irvine community sent 10,000 postcards to the White House asking me to come speak today. Some tried to guilt me into coming. I got one that said, "I went to your first Inauguration, can you please come to my graduation?" [Applause] That was you? Some tried bribery: "I'll support the Chicago Bulls." Another said today would be your birthday. So happy birthday, whoever you are. My personal

²⁸⁷ Sept. 20, 2016.

²⁸⁸ May 7, 2016.

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favorite: Somebody wrote and said, “We are super underrated!” [Laughter] This young lady could have just as well been talking, though, about this generation. I think this generation of young people is super underrated.

Every day you receive a steady stream of sensationalism and scandal and stories with a message that suggest change isn’t possible, that you can’t make a difference, that you won’t be able to close that gap between life as it is and life as you want it to be. My job today is to tell you, don’t believe it. Because *as tough as things have been, I am convinced you are tougher*. I’ve seen your passion, and I’ve seen your service. I’ve seen you engage, and I’ve seen you turn out in record numbers. I’ve heard your voices amplified by creativity and a digital fluency that those of us in older generations can barely comprehend. *I’ve seen a generation eager, impatient even, to step into the rushing waters of history and change its course.*

You have to go through life with more than just passion for change, you need a strategy. I’ll repeat that: I want you to have passion; you have to have a strategy.
– Barack Obama, May 7, 2016

Around the world, we’ve still got challenges to solve that threaten everybody in the 21st century: old scourges like disease and conflict, but also new challenges, from terrorism and climate change. But as complicated and sometimes intractable as these challenges may seem, the truth is that your generation is better positioned than any before you to meet those challenges, to flip the script. Now, how you do that, how you meet these challenges, how you bring about change will ultimately be up to you. My generation, like all generations, is too confined by our own experience, too invested in our own biases, too stuck in our ways to provide much of the new thinking that will be required.

Better is good. Better is good, because you consolidate your gains and then you move on to the next fight from a stronger position. That’s how you change things. Better may not be great, but it’s good. That’s how progress happens, in societies and in our own lives. – Barack Obama, May 7, 2016; May 15, 2016

Your generation reminds me of something President Wilson once said. He said: “Sometimes, people call me an idealist. Well, that is the way I know I am an American.”

Young people—here is what you must know: The world will be what you make of it. You have the power to hold your leaders accountable and to build institutions that serve the people. You can serve in your communities and harness your energy and education to create new wealth and build new connections to the world. You can conquer disease and end conflicts and make change from the bottom up. You can do that. Yes you can—because in this moment, history is on the move. Yes we can.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁹ June 14, 2014; May 14, 2012; May 7, 2016; July 11, 2009.

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America is a better place today than it was when I graduated from college. Since I graduated, in 1983—which isn't that long ago—[*laughter*—I'm just saying. The world is better too. Since I graduated, an Iron Curtain fell, apartheid ended. A young generation in Belfast and London have grown up without ever having to think about IRA bombs. There's more democracy. We virtually eliminated certain diseases like polio. We've cut extreme poverty drastically. We've cut infant mortality by an enormous amount.

The world is changing with accelerating speed. This presents opportunity, but also new dangers. We know all too well, after 9/11, just how technology and globalization has put power once reserved for states in the hands of individuals, raising the capacity of terrorists to do harm. Russia's aggression towards former Soviet states unnerves capitals in Europe, while China's economic rise and military reach worries its neighbors. From Brazil to India, rising middle classes compete with us, and governments seek a greater say in global forums. And even as developing nations embrace democracy and market economies, 24-hour news and social media make it impossible to ignore the continuation of sectarian conflicts and failing states and popular uprisings that might have received only passing notice a generation ago. It will be your generation's task to respond to this new world. The question we face, the question each of you will face, is not whether America will lead, but how we will lead, not just to secure our peace and prosperity, but also extend peace and prosperity around the globe.

This generation coming up—unselfish, altruistic, creative, patriotic—I've seen you in every corner of the country. You believe in a fair and just and inclusive America. You know that constant change has been America's hallmark; that it's not something to fear but something to embrace. You are willing to carry this hard work of democracy forward. You'll soon outnumber all of us, and I believe as a result the future is in good hands.²⁹⁰

Stay with me now: Race relations are better since I graduated. That's the truth. No, my election did not create a postracial society. I don't know who was propagating that notion. That was not mine. But the election itself—and the subsequent one, because the first one, folks might have made a mistake. [*Laughter*] The second one, they knew what they were getting. [*Laughter*] The election itself was just one indicator of how attitudes had changed.

In my Inaugural Address, I remarked that just 60 years earlier, my father might not have been served in a DC restaurant, at least not certain of them. There were no Black CEOs of Fortune 500 companies. Very few Black judges. Today, former Bull Michael Jordan isn't just the greatest basketball player of all time, he owns the team. [*Laughter*] We're no longer entertainers, we're producers, studio executives. No longer small-business owners, we're CEOs. We're mayors,

²⁹⁰ May 7, 2016; May 15, 2016; May 28, 2014; Jan. 10, 2017.

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Representatives, Presidents of the United States. Now, I am not saying gaps do not persist. Obviously, they do. Racism persists. Inequality persists.

I wanted to start, class of 2016, by opening your eyes to the moment that you are in. If you had to choose one moment in history in which you could be born, and you didn't know ahead of time who you were going to be—what nationality, what gender, what race, whether you'd be rich or poor, gay or straight, what faith you'd be born into—you wouldn't choose a hundred years ago. You wouldn't choose the fifties or the sixties or the seventies. You'd choose right now.

I tell you all this because it's important to note progress. Because to deny how far we've come would do a disservice to the cause of justice, to the legions of foot soldiers, to not only the incredibly accomplished individuals who [moved justice forward], but your mothers and your dads and grandparents and great-grandparents, who marched and toiled and suffered and overcame to make this day possible. I tell you this not to lull you into complacency, but to spur you into action. Because there's still so much work to do, so many more miles to travel.²⁹¹

Democracy requires compromise, even when you are a 100-percent right. This is hard to explain sometimes. You can be completely right, and you still are going to have to engage folks who disagree with you. If you think that the only way forward is to be as uncompromising as possible, you will feel good about yourself, you will enjoy a certain moral purity, but you're not going to get what you want. And if you don't get what you want long enough, you will eventually think the whole system is rigged. And that will lead to more cynicism and less participation and a downward spiral of more injustice and more anger and more despair. And that's never been the source of our progress. That's how we cheat ourselves of progress.
– Barack Obama, May 7, 2016

I didn't come here to inspire you. I came here because you, graduates, inspire me. That's why I came here. You have lived through some of the toughest economic times in your country's history, and you still chose to come here and invest in yourself, because you still believe that America is a place where you can make it if you try. That's what hope is, the belief that even if today is hard, with a little hard work, there's something better around the bend.

And it is that promise that has always set this country apart. It's the idea that through hard work and through sacrifice, each of us can pursue our individual dreams, but we still come together as one American family to ensure that the next generation can pursue their dreams as well; that we take responsibility for looking after our own kids, but we're also thinking about somebody else's kids; that if we got a good break and did well, you know what, we're going to turn around and make sure that somebody else gets a break too.²⁹²

²⁹¹ May 7, 2016.

²⁹² May 8, 2015.

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Be a Role Model and Example

Never underestimate the power of your example. I think of a friend of mine who's the daughter of immigrants. When she was in high school, her guidance counselor told her, you know what, you're just not college material. You should think about becoming a secretary. Well, she was stubborn, so she went to college anyway. She got her master's. She ran for local office, won. She ran for State office, she won. She ran for Congress, she won. And lo and behold, Hilda Solis did end up becoming a secretary. [Laughter] She is America's Secretary of Labor.

So think about what that means to a young Latina girl when she sees a Cabinet Secretary who looks like her. Think about what it means to a young girl in Iowa when she sees a Presidential candidate who looks like her. Think about what it means to a young girl walking in Harlem right down the street when she sees a U.N. Ambassador who looks like her. Do not underestimate the power of your example.²⁹³

All of you graduates have the responsibility to be role models for your brothers and sisters, to be mentors in your communities, and when the time comes, to pass that sense of an education's value down to your children, a sense of personal responsibility and self-respect, to pass down a work ethic and an intrinsic sense of excellence that made it possible for you to be here today.²⁹⁴

What if abolitionists and civil right workers had said: "You know, slavery is wrong, segregation is wrong, but it's kind of dangerous to get mixed up in that stuff. I don't have time for all those meetings and marches. I think I'm going to take a pass. I hope it works out, but that's not something I want to do."

I want you to think for a minute about the extraordinary men and women who've worn our country's uniform and have given their last full measure of devotion to keep us safe and free. What if they said, "I really do love this country, but why should I sacrifice so much for people I've never even met?" Young men and women in uniform right now are making those sacrifices.

So you and I are here today because those people made a different choice. They chose to step up. They chose to serve. And I hope you will follow their example, because there is work to be done, and your country needs you.
– Barack Obama, June 7, 2010

Use the power of your example for something larger than yourself.
– Barack Obama, May 19, 2013

In committed young people like you, the world sees the true face of America: our strength, our goodness, our diversity, our enduring power, our ideals.
– Barack Obama, May 13, 2009

²⁹³ May 14, 2012.

²⁹⁴ May 9, 2010.

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Serve Your Communities, and Give Back

In Joplin, Missouri, a town of 50,000 people, nearly 50,000 more came in to help during the weeks after the tornado, perfect strangers who've never met you and didn't ask for anything in return. One of them was Mark Carr, who drove 600 miles from Rocky Ford, Colorado, with a couple of chainsaws and his three little children. One man traveled all the way from Japan, because he remembered that Americans were there for his country after last year's tsunami, and he wanted the chance, he said, "to pay it forward." There were AmeriCorps volunteers who have chosen to leave their homes and stay here in Joplin until the work is done.

When it came time for your prom, makeup artist Melissa Blayton organized an effort that collected over a thousand donated prom dresses; FedEx kicked in for the corsages; Joplin's own Liz Easton, who had lost her home and her bakery in the tornado, made 1,500 cupcakes for the occasion. *There are so many good people in the world. There is such a decency, a bigness of spirit, in this country of ours.*

You're from Joplin, so you will always know that it's always possible for a community to come together when it matters most. You made it work together. *You made it work together. That's the power of community.* Together, you decided this city wasn't about to spend the next year arguing over every detail of the recovery effort. *At the very first town meeting, every citizen was handed a Post-it Note and asked to write down their goals and their hopes for Joplin's future. And more than a thousand notes covered an entire wall and became the blueprint that architects are following to this day.* I'm thinking about trying this with Congress, give them some Post-it Notes. *[Laughter]*

And so my deepest hope for all of you as you graduate is that as you begin this new chapter in your life, you'll bring that spirit of Joplin to every place you travel, to everything you do. You can serve as a reminder that *we're not meant to walk this road alone, that we're not expected to face down adversity by ourselves. We need God. We need each other. We are important to each other, and we're stronger together than we are on our own.*²⁹⁵

Give back, be part of something bigger than yourselves. *Hitch your wagon to something that is bigger than yourselves.* I know that so many of you have already served your community through efforts like your Stuff the Bus food drives and groups like Activists for Action.

And once you start juggling those classes and activities and that campus job, and you get caught up in your own dreams and your own anxieties and dating—*[laughter]*—you may feel like you've got enough on your plate just dealing with your own life. It might be easier to turn the channel when the news disturbs you,

²⁹⁵ May 21, 2012.

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to avert your eyes when you pass that homeless man on the street, to tell yourself that other people's problems really aren't your responsibility.

But just think about what the consequence of that approach to life would have been if that's how folks had acted here in this community. What if those Kalamazoo Promise donors had said to themselves, "Well, you know what, I can pay for my own kid's education; why should I have to pay for somebody else's?"

Think about the consequences for our country. What if our Founding Fathers had said, "You know, colonialism is kind of oppressive, but I'm doing okay, my family's doing all right, why should I spend my summer in Philadelphia arguing about a Constitution?"

What if those abolitionists, those civil right workers had said: "You know, slavery is wrong, segregation is wrong, but it's kind of dangerous to get mixed up in that stuff. I don't have time for all those meetings and marches. I think I'm going to take a pass. I hope it works out, but that's not something I want to do."

I want you to think for a minute about the extraordinary men and women who've worn our country's uniform and have given their last full measure of devotion to keep us safe and free. What if they said, "I really do love this country, but why should I sacrifice so much for people I've never even met?" Young men and women in uniform right now are making those sacrifices.

So you and I are here today because those people made a different choice. They chose to step up. They chose to serve. And I hope you will follow their example, because there is work to be done, and your country needs you.

Wherever your journey takes you, there are going to be children who need mentors and senior citizens who need assistance, folks down on their luck who could use a helping hand. And once you've reached out and formed those connections, you'll find it's a little harder to numb yourself to other people's suffering. It's a little harder to ignore the national debates about the issues that affect their lives and yours. In the end, service binds us to each other and to our communities and our country in a way that nothing else can. It's how we become more fully American.²⁹⁶

Make sure everyone has a voice and everybody gets a seat at the table—that everybody, everybody gets a chance to walk through those doors of opportunity.
— Barack Obama, May 19, 2013

The reason donors created the Kalamazoo Promise was not for recognition or reward but because of their connection to this community, because their belief in your potential, because their faith that you would use this gift not just to enrich your own lives but the lives of others and the life of the Nation.

And I'm told that soon after the Promise was established, a first grader approached the superintendent at the time and declared to her, "I'm going to

²⁹⁶ June 7, 2010.

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college.” First grader. “I’m going to college. I don’t know what it is, but I’m going.” [Laughter]

We may never know those donors’ names, but we know how they helped bring this community together and how you’ve embraced their promise not just as a gift to be appreciated, but a responsibility to be fulfilled. We know how they have helped inspire an entire generation of young people here in Kalamazoo to imagine a different future for themselves.

And, graduates, today I’m asking you to pay them back by seeking to have the same kind of impact with your own lives, by pursuing excellence in everything you do, by serving this country that you love. I know that you can do it.²⁹⁷

Everything your families have done has been so that you could pursue your dreams, so that you could fulfill your potential. *Each of us is only here because somebody somewhere invested in our success. Somebody invested in us. I know that’s true for me.* This community invested in you. You’ve got to make sure that you give back and use those gifts.

Reach back to help others strive to be the best they can be. Each of us is only here because somebody, somewhere, helped us find our path.
– Barack Obama, May 8, 2015

When you make it, pull somebody else up. Preserve our dream. Remember your life is richer when people around you have a shot at opportunity as well. Strive to widen that circle of possibility. Strive to forge that big, generous, optimistic vision of America that we inherited. Strive to carry that dream forward to future generations.²⁹⁸

When you serve, it doesn’t just improve your community, it makes you a part of your community. It breaks down walls. It fosters cooperation. And when that happens, when people set aside their differences, even for a moment, to work in common effort toward a common goal, when they struggle together, and sacrifice together, and learn from one another, then all things are possible. *Think not of yourself, but what you can give to this world.*

Acts of sacrifice and decency without regard to what’s in it for you, create ripple effects, ones that lift up families and communities; that spread opportunity and boost our economy; that reach folks in the forgotten corners of the world who, *in committed young people like you, see the true face of America: our strength, our goodness, our diversity, our enduring power, our ideals.*²⁹⁹

One of our primary reasons for being on this world in the first place is to leave the world a little bit better for the next generation. – Barack Obama, June 14, 2014

²⁹⁷ June 7, 2010.

²⁹⁸ June 11, 2014; April 29, 2011.

²⁹⁹ May 17, 2009; May 20, 2015; May 13, 2009.

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Make a Better World

Throughout our history, a new generation of Americans has reached up and bent the arc of history in the direction of more freedom and more opportunity and more justice. And it is your turn now to shape our Nation's destiny, as well as your own. Young leaders like you can fulfill your destiny and shape our collective future, bend it in the direction of justice and equality and freedom.³⁰⁰

Look past the world as it is and fight for the world as it should be. – Barack Obama, May 19, 2013

Every day, there are officials in high office with responsibilities who mock the overwhelming consensus of the world's scientists that human activities and the release of carbon dioxide and methane and other substances are altering our climate in profound and dangerous ways. A while back, you may have seen a United States Senator trot out a snowball during a floor speech in the middle of winter as "proof" that the world was not warming. [Laughter] I mean, listen, climate change is not something subject to political spin. There is evidence. There are facts. We can see it happening right now. If we don't act, if we don't follow through on the progress we made in Paris [on climate talks], the progress we've been making here at home, your generation will feel the brunt of this catastrophe. So it's up to you to insist upon and shape an informed debate. Imagine if Benjamin Franklin had seen that senator with the snowball, what he would think. Imagine if your fifth-grade science teacher had seen that. [Laughter] He'd get a D. [Laughter]³⁰¹

Change the world and maybe even save it. – Barack Obama, June 14, 2014

We cannot know, each of us, how many days we will walk this Earth. But what we can do is live each day to its fullest. What we can do is look squarely at what will make the biggest difference for future generations and be willing to tackle those challenges.

I leave this stage tonight even more optimistic about this country than when we started. Because I know our work has not only helped so many Americans, it has inspired so many Americans, especially so many young people out there, to believe that you can make a difference, to hitch your wagon to something bigger than yourselves.³⁰²

Think not of yourself, but what you can give to this world. America needs what you have to offer. – Barack Obama, May 20, 2015; May 14, 2012

³⁰⁰ May 15, 2016; May 7, 2016.

³⁰¹ May 15, 2016.

³⁰² May 20, 2015; Jan. 10, 2017.

VII. The Future, and a Last Word

These are extraordinary times, with extraordinary opportunities. Thanks to human progress, a child born anywhere on Earth today can do things that 60 years ago would have been out of reach for the mass of humanity. I see it across the Pacific region, where hundreds of millions have been lifted out of poverty in a single generation. I see it in the faces of young people everywhere who can access the entire world with the click of a button and who are eager to join the cause of eradicating extreme poverty and combating climate change, starting businesses, expanding freedom, and leaving behind the old ideological battles of the past.

America's possibilities are limitless and the future is ours to win. But to get there, we can't just stand still. It has required each generation to sacrifice and struggle and meet the demands of a new age.

The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit, to choose our better history, to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness. We are heirs to a noble struggle for freedom. And now we must summon all of our might and moral suasion to meet the challenges of a new age. God bless this country we love. May He forever bless these United States of America.³⁰³

My fellow Americans, it has been the honor of my life to serve you. I won't stop. In fact, I will be right there with you, as a citizen, for all my remaining days. But for now, whether you are young or whether you're young at heart, I do have one final ask of you as your President, the same thing I asked when you took a chance on me eight years ago. I'm asking you to believe: not in my ability to bring about change, but in yours. I am asking you to hold fast to that faith written into our founding documents; that idea whispered by slaves and abolitionists; that spirit sung by immigrants and homesteaders and those who marched for justice; that creed reaffirmed by those who planted flags from foreign battlefields to the surface of the Moon; a creed at the core of every American whose story is not yet written: Yes, we can. Yes, we did. Yes, we can. Thank you. God bless you. May God continue to bless the United States of America. Thank you.³⁰⁴

³⁰³ Sept. 24, 2013; Jan. 21, 2013; Jan. 25, 2011; Jan. 20, 2009; Dec. 1, 2009; May 15, 2016.

³⁰⁴ Jan. 10, 2017.

VIII. List of Speeches

Sources: Barack Obama Speeches, January 2009–January 2017.*

2009.

“Inaugural Address,” January 20, 2009.

“Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress,” February 24, 2009.

“Remarks to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey in Ankara,” April 6, 2009.

“Commencement Address at Arizona State University in Tempe,” May 13, 2009.

“Commencement Address at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana,” May 17, 2009.

“Commencement Address at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland,” May 22, 2009.

“Remarks to the Ghanaian Parliament in Accra,” July 11, 2009.

“Remarks Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the NAACP in New York City,” July 16, 2009.

“Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on Health Care Reform,” September 9, 2009.

“Remarks to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City,” September 23, 2009.

“Remarks at James C. Wright Middle School in Madison,” November 4, 2009.

“Remarks at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York,” December 1, 2009.

“Remarks on Accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo,” December 10, 2009.

“Remarks at the Nobel Banquet in Oslo,” December 10, 2009.

2010.

“Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union,” January 27, 2010.

“Commencement Address at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan,” May 1, 2010.

“Commencement Address at Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia,” May 9, 2010.

“Commencement Address at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York,” May 22, 2010.

“Commencement Address at Kalamazoo Central High School in Kalamazoo, Michigan,” June 7, 2010.

“Address to the Nation on the Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico,” June 15, 2010.

“Address to the Nation on the End of Combat Operations in Iraq,” August 31, 2010.

“Remarks to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City,” September 23, 2010.

“Remarks to the Indian Parliament in New Delhi,” November 8, 2010.

* National Archives, *Public Papers of the Presidents*.

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2011.

- “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union,” January 25, 2011.
- “Address to the Nation on the Situation in Libya,” March 28, 2011.
- “Commencement Address at Miami Dade College in Miami, Florida,” April 29, 2011.
- “Remarks on the Death of Al Qaida Terrorist Organization Leader Usama bin Laden,” May 1, 2011.
- “Commencement Address at Booker T. Washington High School in Memphis,” May 16, 2011.
- “Commencement Address at the United States Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut,” May 18, 2011.
- “Remarks to the Parliament in London,” May 25, 2011.
- “Address to the Nation on the Drawdown of United States Military Personnel in Afghanistan,” June 22, 2011.
- “Address to the Nation on the Federal Budget,” July 25, 2011.
- “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on Job Growth,” September 8, 2011.
- “Remarks to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City,” September 21, 2011.
- “Remarks to the Parliament in Canberra,” November 17, 2011.

2012.

- “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union,” January 24, 2012.
- “Address to the Nation on United States Military Operations in Afghanistan From Bagram Air Base,” May 2, 2012.
- “Commencement Address at Barnard College in New York City,” May 14, 2012.
- “Commencement Address at Joplin High School in Joplin, Missouri,” May 21, 2012.
- “Commencement Address at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado,” May 23, 2012.
- “Remarks to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City,” September 25, 2012.

2013.

- “Inaugural Address,” January 21, 2013.
- “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union,” February 12, 2013.
- “Commencement Address at Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio,” May 5, 2013.
- “Commencement Address at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia,” May 19, 2013.
- “Commencement Address at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland,” May 24, 2013.
- “Address to the Nation on the Situation in Syria,” September 10, 2013.
- “Remarks to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City,” September 24, 2013.

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2014.

- “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union,” January 28, 2014.
- “Commencement Address at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York,” May 28, 2014.
- “Commencement Address at Worcester Technical High School in Worcester, Massachusetts,” June 11, 2014.
- “Remarks at the Commencement Ceremony of the University of California, Irvine in Anaheim, California,” June 14, 2014.
- “Address to the Nation on United States Strategy To Combat the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) Terrorist Organization,” September 10, 2014.
- “Remarks to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City,” September 24, 2014.
- “Address to the Nation on Immigration Reform,” November 20, 2014.
- “Address to the Nation on United States Policy Toward Cuba,” December 17, 2014.

2015.

- “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union,” January 20, 2015.
- “Commencement Address at Lake Area Technical Institute in Watertown, South Dakota,” May 8, 2015.
- “Commencement Address at the United States Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut,” May 20, 2015.
- “Remarks to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City,” September 28, 2015.
- “Address to the Nation on United States Counterterrorism Strategy,” December 6, 2015.

2016.

- “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union,” January 12, 2016.
- “Remarks on Closing the Detention Facilities at the United States Naval Base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba,” February 23, 2016.
- “Commencement Address at Howard University,” May 7, 2016.
- “Commencement Address at Rutgers University–New Brunswick in Piscataway, New Jersey,” May 15, 2016.
- “Commencement Address at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado,” June 2, 2016.
- “Remarks to the Parliament in Ottawa, Canada,” June 29, 2016.
- “Remarks to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City,” September 20, 2016.

2017.

- “Farewell Address to the Nation From Chicago, Illinois,” January 10, 2017.
- “Message to the Nation on Serving as President,” January 19, 2017.

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