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Barack Obama

Speech on the National Wireless Initiative

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It is wonderful to be here in the Upper Peninsula with so many Yoopers. How many of you are Green Bay fans, too? I've been seeing too many Green Bay fans lately.

It is great to be here. It is great to be at Northern Michigan University. We've got some wonderful guests here that I just want to mention. First of all, somebody who is as good a public servant, not just good at what he does but good at heart and works tirelessly on behalf of the entire state, your senior senator, Carl Levin, is here. Now, his partner in the Senate could not be here because she's actually leading a Democratic caucus retreat, but she's been fighting for manufacturing, for broadband, for a lot of things that we're talking about here today. So I just want to acknowledge Debbie Stabenow, who deeply cares about the work that you do up here.

I want to thank the great hospitality of Mayor John Kivela, who has been showing me around town. Thank you so much, Mayor Kivela. The President of Northern Michigan University, Dr. Les Wong, is here. And all of you are here. And you guys are pretty special. Absolutely.

Before I begin, I just want to say that we are following today's events in Egypt very closely. And we'll have more to say as this plays out. But what is absolutely clear is that we are witnessing history unfold. It's a moment of transformation that's taking place because the people of Egypt are calling for change. And they've turned out in extraordinary numbers representing all ages and all walks of life, but it's young people who've been at the forefront -- a new generation, your generation, who want their voices to be heard. And so going forward, we want those young people and we want all Egyptians to know America will continue to do everything that we can to support an orderly and genuine transition to democracy in Egypt.



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Now, as we watch what's taking place, we're also reminded that we live in an interconnected world. What happens across the globe has an impact on each and every one of us. And that's why I've come to Marquette today -- not only because it's beautiful, and the people are really nice -- which is true. But I've come here because in the 21st century, it's not just the big cities where change is happening. It's also in towns like this where the jobs and businesses of tomorrow will take root, and where young and talented Americans can lead. It's towns like this where our economic future will be won.

Now, in the short term, the best thing we can do to speed up economic growth is to make sure families and businesses have more money to spend, and that's exactly what -- got a little applause there. That's exactly why we passed those tax cuts in December. That's what it's doing. Because Democrats and Republicans came together, Americans' paychecks will be a little bigger this year and businesses will be able to write off their investments and companies will grow and they'll add workers. But we've got more to do.

Our measure of success has to be whether every American who wants a job can find a job; whether this country is still the place where you can make it if you try. In a world that's more connected and more competitive, other nations look at this moment as their moment, their turn to win the jobs and industries of our time. I see things differently. I see this as America's moment to win the future, so that the 21st century is the American century just like the 20th century was. Yes we can.

But to do this, we're going to have to up our game, Marquette. We got to up our game. To attract the best jobs, the newest industries, we're going to have to out-innovate, out-educate, out-build. We're going to have to out-hustle the rest of the world. That means investing in cutting-edge research and technology, like the new advanced battery manufacturing industry that's taking root right here in the state of Michigan. It means investing in the skills and training of our people, just like it's taking place at this university. It means investing in transportation and communications networks that move goods and information as fast as possible.

And to make room for these investments, we're going to have to cut whatever spending we can do without. We've got a real issue with debts and deficit, and so we've got to live within our means. And that means that we've got to cut out things that aren't adding to growth and opportunity in order to invest in those things that are.

And that's why I've proposed that we freeze annual domestic spending for the next five years. That will reduce the deficit by more than 400 billion dollars over the next decade. It will bring spending to the lowest share of our economy since Eisenhower was President. That's a long time ago. Even I wasn't born then.



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So government has to do what American families do every day: live within our means. But even as we do so, we can't sacrifice our future. I'll just give you guys an analogy. If you're trying to cut back in your family, you might decide, we're not going to go out to dinner so often; maybe we'll skip the vacation; we're not going to remodel the kitchen. But you wouldn't stop saving for your child's college education. You wouldn't stop saving for your own retirement. If your boiler was broken or your roof had a leak, you'd still go ahead and make those investments.

Well, the same is true with our country. We've got to cut out the equivalence of eating out and vacations. I know there may be some restaurant owners here -- go eat at their restaurants -- but I'm just making a general point. Even as we cut out the things we can afford to do without, we got a responsibility to invest in those areas that will have the biggest impact on our future, and those things are innovation, education and infrastructure.

And that last area -- infrastructure -- is why I've come here today. Connecting a country of our size has never been easy. Just imagine what Americans experienced when they fanned out from 13 colonies to settle a continent. If you wanted to get from one coast to the other, it would take you months; it would cost you a small fortune. If you settled in the heartland, you were an island, with no real market to sell your goods or buy what you needed. You might have to wait until the traders came by before you stocked up.

So we decided to build a railroad to span a continent -- one that would blast through mountains of granite and use thousands of miles of steel, and put to work an army of citizens and immigrants to work. It was an endeavor that would also require support of our government. It didn't just happen on its own. As General William T. Sherman said, "Uncle Sam is the only giant I know who can grapple the subject."

So even as President Lincoln tried to hold the North and South together, he was determined to see this railroad unite East and West. And private companies joined the charge, racing one another to meet in the middle. And eventually, a telephone operator -- a telegraph operator sent out a simple message to the cheers of a waiting nation. The telegraph just said: "Done." Done. Now, if he knew that we were still talking about it today, he might have come up with something more inspiring.

But overnight, the transcontinental railroad laid the way for a nationwide economy, not a bunch of local economies, but a nationwide economy. Suddenly, a cross-country trip was cut from months to days. The cost to move goods and mail plummeted. Cowboys drove cattle to railcars that whisked them back East. Entrepreneurs could sell anything, anywhere.

After the railroad was completed, a newspaper proclaimed: "We are the youngest of peoples. But we are teaching the world to march forward." Teaching the world to march forward.



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That's who we are. We are a nation that has always been built to compete. And that's why, decades later, FDR set up the Rural Electrification Administration to help bring power to vast swaths of America that were still in darkness. Companies said that building lines to rural areas would be too costly. I mean, big cities already had electricity. But they said, it's too costly to go out into remote areas. It's too costly to come up into the Upper Peninsula.

So Americans in these towns went without refrigeration or running water. If you wanted a glimpse of the larger world, your town might run a movie off a small diesel engine. It might not even last the full film.

Once power lines were laid down, electricity flowed to farms across the country, transforming millions of lives. There's a well-known story of a Texas family returning home the first night their farmhouse was hooked up, and a woman thought it was on fire. And her daughter said, "No, Mama, the lights are on." Think about that. That wasn't that long ago, and government was there to help make sure that everybody -- everybody, not just some -- but everybody -- not just those who folks could make an immediate profit off of -- but everybody had access to electricity.

So years later, as our nation grew by leaps and bounds, we realized that a patchwork system of back roads and dirt paths couldn't handle the biggest economy in the world. So President Eisenhower helped make it possible to build an Interstate Highway System, and that, too, transformed the nation -- as much as the railways had.

And finally, we could ship goods and services to places that the railroads didn't reach. It meant that we could live apart from where we worked. We could travel. We could see America.

Each of these achievements -- none of them just happened. We chose to do them. We chose to do big things. And every American benefited -- not just from new conveniences. Not just from the jobs created by laying down new lines or tracks or pavement. We benefited enormously from new economic growth -- from the scores of businesses that opened near each town's new train station, or new power line, or new off-ramp.

So this is a new century, and we can't expect tomorrow's economy to take root using yesterday's infrastructure. We got to think about what's the next thing, what's the next big thing, and make sure that we're at the forefront -- just like we were in the last century.

Today, new companies are going to seek out the fastest, most reliable ways to move people, goods and information, whether they are in Shanghai or in Chicago. So if we want new jobs and businesses here in America, we've got to have the best transportation system and the best communication network in the world. It's like that movie, *Field of Dreams*: If we build it, they will come. But we've got to build it. We've got to build it.



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Over the last two years, we've begun rebuilding for the 21st century. This is a national project that has meant thousands of jobs for the hard-hit construction industry. And I've now proposed redoubling these efforts. We want to put more Americans to work repairing crumbling bridges and roads. Within 25 years, our goal is to have 80 percent of Americans with access to high-speed rail, which could allow you to go to places in half the time it takes by car. Within five years, we want to make it possible for businesses to put high-speed wireless services in reach of virtually every American.

And that last part, high-speed wireless, is why I chose to come to Northern Michigan University today. Now let me give you some context. Today, more than 90 percent of homes in South Korea subscribe to high-speed broadband. They just have better networks than we do. In America, the nation that created the Internet -- by the way, because of government investment; it didn't just happen by itself magically -- because of government R&D, we created the Internet, but yet only 65 percent of households here in America can say the same. When it comes to high-speed Internet, the lights are still off in one-third of our households. One out of every three households in America don't have that same access. For millions of Americans, the railway hasn't showed up yet.

For our families and our businesses, high-speed wireless service, that's the next train station; it's the next off-ramp. It's how we'll spark new innovation, new investment, new jobs.

And you know this here in Northern Michigan. That's why I showed up, in addition to it being pretty and people being nice. For decades now, this university has given a new laptop to every incoming student. Wi-Fi stretched across campus. But if you lived off-campus, like most students and teachers here, you were largely out of luck. Broadband was often too expensive to afford. And if you lived a bit further out of town, you were completely out of luck, because broadband providers, they often won't build networks where it's not profitable, just like they wouldn't build electrical lines where it wasn't profitable.

So this university tried something new. You partnered with various companies to build a high-speed, next-generation wireless network. And you managed to install it with six people in only four days without raising tuition. Good job. Good job, Mr. President. By the way, if you give me the name of these six people -- there's a whole bunch of stuff in Washington I'd like to see done in four days with six people.

So today, this is one of America's most connected universities, and enrollment is near the highest it's been in 30 years.

And what's more -- and this is what makes this special -- you told nearby towns that if they allowed you to retrofit their towers with new equipment to expand your network, then their schools, their first responders, their city governments could use it too. And as a result, police officers can access crime databases in their cars. And firefighters can download blueprints on the way to a burning building. And public works officials can save money by monitoring pumps and equipment remotely.



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And you've created new online learning opportunities for K-12 students as far as 30 miles away, some of whom -- some of whom can't always make it to school in a place that averages 200 inches of snow a year. Now, some of these students don't appreciate the end of school [snow] days. I know Malia and Sasha get really excited about school [snow] days. Of course, in Washington things shut down when there's an inch of snow. But this technology is giving them more opportunity. It's good for their education, it's good for our economy. In fact, I just came from a demonstration of online learning in action. We were with Professor Lubig and he had plugged in Negaunee High School -- and Powell Township School in Big Bay. So I felt like the guy in Star Trek. I was being beamed around -- across the Upper Peninsula here.

But it was remarkable to see the possibilities for these young people who are able to, let's say, do a chemistry experiment, and they can compare the results with kids in Boston.

Or if there's some learning tool or material they don't have immediately accessible in their school, they can connect here to the university, and they're able to tap into it.

It's opening up an entire world to them. And one of the young people who I was talking to, he talked about foreign policy and what we were seeing in places like Egyptian. And he said, what's amazing especially for us is that now we have a window to the entire world, and we can start understanding other cultures and other places in ways that we could never do without this technology.

For local businesses, broadband access is helping them grow and prosper and compete in a global economy. In fact, Marquette has been rated one of the top five "eCities" in Michigan for entrepreneurship. That's right. So here's a great example, Getz's Clothiers. The Getzes are here. Where are the Getzes? They're around here somewhere. There they are right there.

This is a third-generation, family-owned, Marquette institution. They've occupied the same downtown store for more than a century -- but with the help of broadband, they were recently listed as one of America's 5,000 fastest-growing companies. Now how did they pull that off?

Obviously they've got great products, great service. But what's also true is online sales now make up more than two-thirds of their annual revenue. Think about that. You got a downtown department store; now two-thirds of its sales are online. It can process more than 1,000 orders a day, and its workforce has more than doubled. So you've got a local business with a global footprint because of technology.

Now, if you can do this in snowy U.P. -- we can do it all across America. In fact, many places already are. So in Wagner, South Dakota, patients can receive high-quality, lifesaving medical care from a Sioux Falls specialist who can monitor their EKG and listen to their breathing -- from 100 miles away. In Ten Sleep, Wyoming -- I love the name of that town, Ten Sleep -- it's a town in Wyoming of 300 people. A fiber-optic network allowed a company to employ several hundred teachers who teach English to students in Asia over the Internet, 24 hours a day. You've all heard about outsourcing. Well, this is "insourcing" -- where overseas work is done right here in the United States of America.



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So we want to multiply these stories -- we want to multiply your story -- all over the country. We want to invest in the next generation of high-speed wireless coverage for 98 percent of Americans.

This isn't just about faster Internet or being able to find a friend on Facebook. It's about connecting every corner of America to the digital age. It's about a rural community in Iowa or Alabama where farmers can monitor weather across the state and market across the globe. It's about an entrepreneur on Main Street with a great idea she hopes to sell to the big city. It's about every young person who no longer has to leave his hometown to seek new opportunity -- because opportunity is right there at his or her fingertips.

So to make this happen, we're going to invest in research and development of emerging technologies and applications. We're going to accelerate breakthroughs in health and education and transportation, and deploy a new nationwide, interoperable wireless network for first responders -- making sure they've got the funding and the frequencies that they were promised and that they need to keep us safe. It's important. By selling private companies the rights to these airwaves, we won't just encourage private investment and expand wireless access; we're actually going to bring in revenues that lower our deficits.

Now, access to high-speed Internet by itself won't make a business more successful, or a student smarter, or a citizen more informed. That takes hard work. It takes those late nights. It takes hustle. It takes that quintessentially American drive to be the best. That's what's the most important ingredient for our success.

But we've always believed that we have a responsibility to guarantee all our people every tool necessary for them to meet their full potential. So if they're willing to work hard, they can succeed. And in a 21st-century economy, that has never been more important. Every American deserves access to the world's information. Every American deserves access to the global economy. We have promised this for 15 years. It's time we delivered on that promise. It's time we delivered on that promise.

So connecting our people. Competing with the rest of the world. Living within our means without sacrificing what's required to win the future. We can do all this because we've done it before.

In 1960, at the height of his presidential campaign, JFK came to Michigan. And it was a moment similar to this one. Other nations were doing their best to try to take our place at the top. And here in Michigan, he made it clear that if we wanted to keep from being knocked off our perch, there could only be one goal for the United States. It could be summed up in one word: "first." First.



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"I do not mean first, but," he said. "I don't mean first, when. I don't mean first, if. I mean first -- period." And "The real question now," he continued, "The real question," he continued, "is whether we're up to the task -- whether each and every one of us is willing to face the facts, to bear the burdens, to provide the risks, and to meet our dangers." That was 50 years ago. But things haven't changed in terms of what's required to succeed.

And we were up to the task then. I believe we're up to the task today. Time and again, whether westward or skyward, with each rail and road that we've laid, in every community, we've connected with our own science and imagination, and we forged anew our faith that we can do anything. We do big things. That's who we are. And that's who we're going to have to be again -- a young nation that teaches the world to march forward.

That's what you're doing up here in U.P. That's what you're doing here at Northern Michigan University. That's what we're all going to do together in the months and years to come.

Thank you. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.