Ladies and gentlemen please welcome the Vice President of the United States Joey Biden and Dr. Jill Biden

*applause*

Hello and thank you!

Hello Pellissippi State Community College it’s great to be back in Knoxville and hello to my colleagues and hello to all the students who are here today. Thank you Governor Haslam for that kind introduction and for welcoming us to your state. We are here today because community colleges have entered a new day in America. Community Colleges lead the way in preparing graduates in the fields of Advanced Manufacturing, Energy, and Information Technology, some of the fastest growing fields in America and the rest of the world. In fact, nearly half of all undergraduate students attend community colleges. Equipping American workers with the skills they need to succeed in the global economy is a top priority for President Obama and my husband Joe, the Vice President.

*applause*

But I am not a politician, I am an English professor.

*applause*

I have taught in community colleges for more than twenty years and I still teach full time at a community college outside of Washington D.C. In fact I was just in my classroom yesterday preparing for the semester ahead. Teaching is my life’s work. I teach because I love seeing the difference that I hope to make in my students’ lives. My goal is to always give them the confidence in their own abilities because I know that confidence will carry them well beyond my classroom in whatever they do. And as I work hard every day to inspire my students, it is ultimately they who inspire me. In my classroom I find single parents who come to school in the evening weary from a long day yet eager to create a brighter future for their children. I have taught veterans who return to the classroom to complete their higher education as they look to transition to civilian careers and I have seen workers who have gone as far as they can go in their jobs get the skills they need to go to reach the next level. I see it over and over again because the students are so committed to furthering their education they know it is the key for a better life for themselves and their families. I know what happens in a community college classroom and it is extraordinary.

As Second Lady and at President Obama’s request, I have traveled across the country visiting community colleges from Seattle to Miami and from Texas to right here in the heart of Tennessee. In fact, two years ago I visited Roane State Community College during my Community College to Career bus tour. I have been to over sixty campuses to learn more about how community colleges are providing students with the education and training that they need for the jobs of the twenty first century. This all goes back to our fundamental belief if you are ready to work you should be able to find a job that fits your skills or get trained with the skills you need for a better job. We all reap the benefits when our citizens are well educated and well trained, it means that our economies are more vibrant and the future is brighter. This
is the moment for community colleges to shine. As an educator, I am grateful and tremendously proud to work for a president, and a Vice President, who are committed to restoring the promise of the American educational system. We recognize the value of community colleges and investing in them. We believe that all Americans deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential. It is now my pleasure to introduce my husband, our Vice President, Joe Biden.

*applause*

Thank you very much, thank you, thank you, please, thank you. Please excuse my back, I apologize my back being to you and my name is Joe Biden, I am Jill Biden’s husband. You all had the immediate same instinctive reaction when she said ‘it’s a pleasure working with the President and the Vice President,’ can you imagine her working for me? I mean that’s the first time I’ve ever heard fellas that that ever uttered I say to my colleagues in the senate and the governors, but I uh, that’s why this was worth the trip I’m here just sandwiched between a great President and a great Second Lady who’s passion for the community colleges is as intense as you could probably see and this is known as “Jill’s Territory” No I mean that sincerely, in the White House this is known as “Jill’s Territory” she has been, she and Arne Duncan have been, our Secretary of Education, have been just absolutely relentless in their making the case that the single best kept secret in America is the community college system and our administration is committed to letting that secret out. So Governor, thank you for your hospitality it was not only great being here but getting to ride in with you from the airport in, what a beautiful part of the world you all live in, what a beautiful part of the world.

*applause*

And to my friend, Lamar Alexander, who is as an old saying goes my own neighborhood back east who’s forgotten more about education than most people are going to learn and to Bob Corker who’s a great friend we served together on the Foreign Relations committee now he is the chairman of that powerful committee and Pellissippi State Community College President Anthony Wise it’s a delight to have you here.

Now I imagine some of the students behind me and all the professors behind me and those of you students out in the audience here you’ve all know the names of people that Jill was talking about. That nineteen year old kid although qualified, doesn’t have the money to go to a four year college but knows that the cheapest way to get there is through transferring credits from a solid community college. That thirty-five year old woman who’s been a victim of abuse and her family has broken away and decided that she is moving forward and is going to take care of she and her children and has the courage to go back. That forty year old man who has lost his job then has never really was that good in school but musters up the courage to decide to go back to school to go to community college that guy who says ‘k I’m going to try this, I’m going to do this for my family.’ That’s a hard thing. That’s a hard, hard, hard thing for people to do but the stock of students who make up our community colleges is the stuff America is made of and I really mean that. Think about; think about the students, particularly those who have been away a long time. Imagine all of you with good educations if you were going to go back to school now after having been out of the classroom for five, ten, fifteen, twenty years. It’s intimidating. It
takes real courage. It takes real commitment. And it’s a plain fact that community colleges are one of the most direct avenues today to middle class and we need you. We need the colleges and we need the stuff of which they are made of. You know that when the President and I were first sworn in back in 2009 we stated then what we said when we joined as a team to run for President and Vice President that our first goal was to pull America out of the greatest recession on our history short of depression and in the process re-establish the footing of the middle class in America because that footing was already being lost before the great recession because the middle class is the vehicle that built this great country. It’s been built on the shoulders of hard-working middle class people. And so, the fact of the matter is, everything we have done, and we have made mistakes but on balance I am very proud of everything we have done has been designed to give the middle class a better footing. But we had to rebuild the foundation of the economy first. Democrats and Republicans and quite frankly the American people having the grit to do it and America, America is coming back and coming back strong.

*applause*

I might know parenthetically you’re no longer here, significant business people or anyone talking about how the rest of the world the Asia and China are going to out-compete us. How the European Union is going to eat our lunch. The truth of the matter is, America’s position, to in fact play the same role in the twenty-first century as we did in the twentieth century and if we do what we should, there’s no reason why this will not be an American century. The magic the magic of the phenomenal growth of the United States beginning in the earliest twentieth century was the consequence of a fundamental decision made in state of New York in the late nineteenth, excuse me, late eighteen hundreds. Where it was decided that in America that every American be entitled to twelve years of education. The first nation in the world to do that. The first nation. Not everyone was guaranteed to graduate but everyone is entitled to have access, free access, to an education and the rest of the world was way behind. But it took a long time to catch up but they have caught up and now, now we know what you all know. Twelve years is not enough, twelve years is not enough. Any more than eight years was enough in 1919. It doesn’t mean that everyone needs a four-year degree or a graduate degree, there are many other avenues, but six out of ten jobs by the end of this decade will require training beyond a high school degree. It can be an apprenticeship, it can be a certificate, it can be a two year degree, a four year degree, a graduate degree. So the world has changed. Competition has changed. But the United States and the American people have built into their DNA a confidence that is showing now and showing through as it always has but we have to make sure that every person in America gets an education to the extent that they desire and to the extent to which they are capable. That’s why the President asked me at the State of the Union a year ago almost to the day to come up with a roadmap to determine how to main how do we maintain and guarantee we have the most skilled workforce in the world? It’s within our capacity, but it’s also absolutely necessary if we’re going to capitalize on the overwhelming potential that still exists here in this country. Ladies and gentlemen, the facts are there and the opportunities are there as well. We’re going to need, for example, it showed after a 7 month study with the whole of the government looking at it, we’re going to need 1.3 million IT jobs by the end of this decade average salary fifty thousand dollars a year requiring less than a two year degree or less. In healthcare, we need another six hundred thousand registered nurses in the near term, average salary sixty to seventy five thousand
dollars a year. Some need bachelor’s degrees but most associate degrees. You can live a middleclass life with one of the wage earners making that basic salary. I could go on, jobs in advanced manufacturing and energy, these are the kinds of good paying middleclass jobs that Americans can get through training at a community college. The point is that access to education after high school is critical for your generation, the generation of students behind me. It’s critical, as critical as a high school education was for our grandparents. It is simply that straight forward and as Jill has said many times over the last twenty years, ‘Any country that out-educates us will out-compete us.’ Let me say it again any country that out-educated us, will out-compete us and there is no reason, non-whatsoever why we have to allow that to happen. Like I said this is the best kept secret in America, the most flexible mechanism is a community college. Nearly forty percent of all undergraduate in the United States of America are in community colleges now and on almost every state in the union, which wasn’t the case twenty-five years ago, that there’s a direct path if the student chooses it to take those credits, which are directly transferrable to UT or the University of Delaware or other state universities to a four year degree cutting essentially in half the cost. But we gotta keep it up, we gotta do more and its fully within our capacity to do that. President Kennedy said, and I quote, “Our process as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education.” Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education. I remember four years ago as we used to say in the senate as my colleagues would say school is a point of personal privilege. Michelle, Barack, I don’t say that publicly, the First Lady and the President, Jill and I were standing in the wings about to be introduced to the convention hall, with I don’t remember sixty eighty thousand people and we stood there looking at each other kind of marveling that we were standing there and I forget who said it, it was Jill or Michelle that not one of us would be standing there were it not for the help we got, the help we got, beyond what our families could do. The help we got to get the education we had. Not one of us would be standing there. Everyone should have that opportunity, everyone. No guarantees, everyone. And the man who I believe is more committed to making sure everyone has that opportunity, more committed than any man or woman I have worked with in my entire career, is the man I’d like to introduce to you now, my friend the President of the United States, Barack Obama.

*applause*