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WITH PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA
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Introduction of President Barack Obama

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President

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IT IS AN HONOR AND PRIVILEGE TO HAVE THE president with us here this evening. I would like to explain why the president's visit is so important for this institution, for this state, and for our country.

Barack Obama is a man of intellect devoted to the common good, which is a rare thing. He is a man whose journey from boyhood teaches us all about the power of a single life with purpose, and each of our graduates should remember this. Barack Obama is a man whose dream of and for America knows no limit.

Often the dream about a limitless America, however, comes from a different point of view—the dream comes from those who have benefited solely from the economic success of their parents and the social status of their family. And sometimes those who view the limitless dream of the United States have a fanciful or idealized view of our history, a view that is often distorted and inaccurate.

But occasionally, and this is uncommon, this understanding of America's true greatness and our potential as a nation comes from a deep understanding of the need to drive change. Martin Luther King Jr. once said that: "Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle." Barack Obama understands—from the experiences of his family, his work in organizing communities in Chicago, his deep understanding of the U.S. Constitution, and his raw and powerful intellect—that continuous struggle is essential to move us even closer to the ideal America.

In this ideal America the yokes that hold any of us back must be taken off to create opportunities for success. One of those yokes has been the limitation on access to education for every child. Here our history as a country has been long and difficult, and while progress has been made since the 1950s, we remain far from the ideal. Twenty-five percent of our children—more than a million children per year—don't graduate from high school. And for those that do, even the most gifted student from a family in the lowest socioeconomic bracket has less than a 15 percent chance of graduating from a university.

Mr. President, few national leaders before you have so fully understood the role of education, learning, and knowledge in fulfilling the American ideal—in advancing the continuous struggle for change. Your life and your achievements as a community organizer, constitutional law professor, and statesman, reveals a great awareness of the enigma of our present America: how is it that we have changed so much and yet have so much further to go?

You realize that our Constitution and thus our civil rights, our right to vote, and our right to be educated is not a static condition but in fact is a constantly advancing evolutionary ideal. In this evolutionary process you see change as essential to our life and to our future as Americans.

You see an America where all children graduate from high school and most go on to college at some level. In this process of change you see an America where every talent can be tapped and every dream has real potential.

Mr. President, You have already taken many bold steps to improve our nation and to move us forward. You have already changed how we conceive of education: education is now a national civic duty. It is not a privilege—it is a civic duty. You have given hope to all who dream about who they can become. And as I am increasingly beginning to see, you have lit a fire under all of us to move America forward using our ideas and our creativity.

Mr. President, We feel that fire and share your drive for change. We heard your speech before Congress on February 24 and saw you urging us closer to the ideal of a better America. With respect to your expansion of Pell grants, your goal to educate all of America, your drive to provide a great college education accessible to all who work hard—we hear you and we join you. Tonight we are committing to you and to the people of Arizona that we will continue building ASU as an egalitarian center for advanced teaching and learning. And we commit to you also that no Arizona student will be left out of this university because of his or her family income.

Mr. President, We are pleased to announce the establishment of the Barack Obama Scholars Program and pledge to you to work and fight to make education accessible—to bring about the change that takes America to the next level.

It is an honor to have you here with us this evening. Ladies and Gentlemen: the President of the United States.

ABOUT PRESIDENT MICHAEL M. CROW

Michael Crow became the sixteenth president of Arizona State University on July 1, 2002. He is guiding the transformation of ASU into one of the nation's leading public metropolitan research universities, an institution that combines the highest levels of academic excellence, inclusiveness to a broad demographic, and maximum societal impact—a model he terms the “New American University.” Under his direction the university pursues teaching, research, and creative excellence focused on the major challenges and questions of our time, as well as those central to the building of a sustainable environment and economy for Arizona. He has committed the university to social embeddedness and global engagement, and championed initiatives that have led to record levels of diversity in the student body. While the freshman class has increased in size by 42 percent since 2002, enrollment of students of color has increased by 100 percent, and the number of students enrolled from families below the poverty line has risen by roughly 500 percent.

During his tenure ASU has marked a number of important milestones, including the establishment of major interdisciplinary research initiatives such as the Biodesign Institute, the Global Institute of Sustainability, the Flexible Display Center, and the Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict; the establishment of more than a dozen new interdisciplinary schools, including the School of Human Evolution and Social Change, and the School of Earth and Space Exploration; an unprecedented research infrastructure expansion; and the announcement of the eight largest gifts in the history of the university. According to the National Science Foundation, ASU is now ranked among the top 20 leading research universities in the nation without a medical school, and according to one authoritative international assessment ranks among the leading 100 universities globally.

Prior to joining ASU, President Crow was professor of science policy and executive vice provost of Columbia University, where he oversaw Columbia's research enterprise and technology transfer operations. A fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration and member of the Council on Foreign Relations, he is the author of books and articles relating to the design of science and technology policy and the creation of knowledge enterprises.