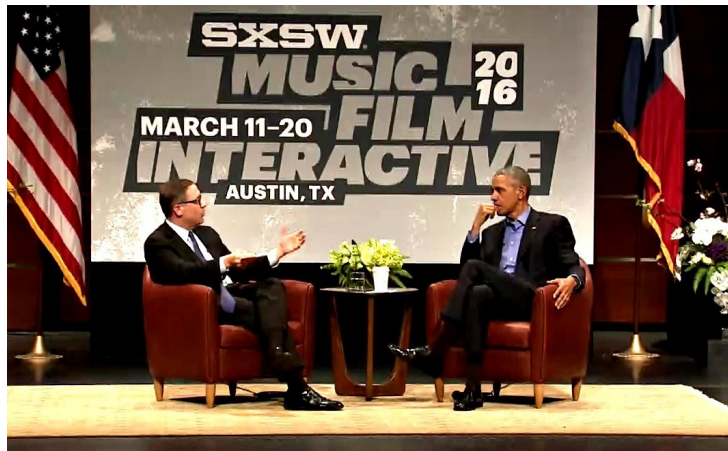# AmericanRhetoric.com

Barack Obama

Remarks at South by Southwest Interactive

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AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio

Moderator Evan Smith: Hi, Mr. President.

President Obama: Hey! It's good to see you, and hello, Austin! I love Austin, Texas.

Audience Member: We love you!

President Obama: Thank you. It's just good to be back.

Moderator Smith: Nice to have you here. Welcome. Welcome to Austin. Welcome to South by Southwest. Let's make a little news. You stopped at Torchy's on the way in from the airport.

President Obama: I did.

Moderator Smith: You did. Would you please share with the world what you told me backstage -- your order? Perfectly in keeping with your political views.

President Obama: I ordered the Democrat.   But then I ordered a Republican and an Independent, because I wanted to give all people a proper hearing. I wanted to be fair.

Moderator Smith: Bipartisan in tacos as in life.

President Obama: That's exactly right.

Moderator Smith: That's how it goes. Mr. President, you're very nice to be here with us today. And you came for a purpose. You want to accomplish something. You said as much in your weekly radio address last weekend. I got the opportunity to hear it. Some people in the room have not heard it. For their benefit, and people outside the room, would you say why you're here? Make the pitch in miniature, please.

President Obama: Well, first of all, I'm here because I like excuses to come to Austin, Texas.   And that's a good enough reason. And I want to acknowledge your Mayor, Steve Adler, who bought tacos with me.

I normally don't do this, but I'm going to embarrass somebody -- I'm going to also acknowledge the Chancellor of the Texas System because he's one of my favorite people and a truly great American -- Bill McRaven, who I think is over there.   It's pretty rare where a chancellor of a university system can really mess you up.   So, in case any of the students are wondering, don't mess with your chancellor.   But I knew him as Admiral, and he served America as well as anybody served it.

Look, we are at a moment in history where technology, globalization, our economy is changing so fast. And this gathering, South by Southwest, brings together people who are at the cutting-edge of those changes. Those changes offer us enormous opportunities but also are very disruptive and unsettling. They empower individuals to do things that they could have never dreamed of before, but they also empower folks who are very dangerous to spread dangerous messages.

And part of my challenge since I've been President is trying to find ways in which our government can be a part of the positive change that's taking place and can help convene and catalyze folks in the private sector and the non-profit sector to be part of the broader civic community in tackling some of our biggest challenges.

And just three things that I talked about during my weekly address where this group, I think, is prime to make a difference. Number one, we're spending a lot of time figuring out how can we make government work through technology, digital platforms, and so forth. So, for example, we've reduced the FAFSA form process where you apply for student aid by about two-thirds just by digitalizing it, putting it online, making it a little more common sense. We have made it now possible to apply for Social Security online in ways that couldn't be done before. Across agencies, we're interacting every day with our government, and the question is, how do we make that work better? Because an anti-government mentality grows if people feel frustrated because they're not getting good service.

The second thing that these new technologies allow us to do is to tackle big problems in new ways. We had a conference in Washington a few weeks back on what we're calling precision medicine -- the capacity today to potentially cure diseases because we understand the human genome and we understand that a cure for me may not be the same as a cure for you. And there's incredible research taking place all around the country, but we haven't gathered all that data together to make sure that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

And number three, we want to make sure that we're using big data, analytics, technology to make civic participation easier. Voters -- increasing voting rights and making sure that people are informed about who they're voting for and why they're voting. Making sure that community organizations or activists are able to meet and help to shape our society in new ways.

So the reason I'm here really is to recruit all of you. It's to say to you as I'm about to leave office, how can we start coming up with new platforms, new ideas, new approaches across disciplines and across skill sets to solve some of the big problems that we're facing today. Because, I've said this before, I said this at the State of the Union, the most important office in a democracy is the office of citizen. And right now, with all the talent that's out there, our government is not working and our politics isn't working as well as it should -- the only way we're going to solve that is make sure that we're getting citizens involved in ways that we haven't up until now.

Moderator Smith: Mr. President, the theory of bringing tech more closely aligned with government in solving problems is great, but the reality is that the culture of the tech sector and the culture of government could not be more different. Government is big and bloated and slow and risk-averse, and it's run on outmoded systems and outmoded equipment. Tech is sleek and streamlined, and fail-fast and enamored of the new and the shiny.

How do you take these two things that seem culturally to be so unalike and put them together in a way where they can and want to work together?

President Obama: Well, let me give you an example of the big and the bloated and the frustrated. You may recall that I passed this law called the Affordable Care Act to sign people up for health care.   And then the website didn't work.

Moderator Smith: I heard that.

President Obama: And this was a little embarrassing for me because I was the cool, early adaptor President.

Moderator Smith: Right. Not exactly an advertisement for --

President Obama: And my entire campaign had been premised on having really cool technology, and social media and all that. Well, here's what happened, was that the procurement systems, the specifications, the way that software was built in government was adapted for the age when procurement was for buying boots or buying pencils or buying furniture as opposed to buying software.

And so there's an example of an outdated system -- bloated, risk-averse, not working well. Here's what happened as a consequence of healthcare.gov breaking down, though -- we had to bring in a SWAT team of all my friends from Silicon Valley and from Austin and some of the best software engineers in the world to come in and fix it -- which we did in about three, four months' time.

And what we realized was that we could potentially build a SWAT team, a world-class technology office inside of the government that was helping across agencies. We've dubbed that the U.S. Digital Services. And we've got some of the top talent from Google, from Facebook, from all the top tech companies.   These folks are coming in, in some cases, for six months, in some cases for two years -- and they are making an enormous difference in making sure that veterans are getting services on time, fixing outdated systems, making sure that agencies like the Small Business Administration that has been clunky, is redesigning itself so that if an entrepreneur wants to start up a business here in Texas, that they can go to one spot and within a day they've handled all the regulatory red tape that used to require them maybe months to navigate.

Now, the folks who are working in this Digital Service, they're having a great time, and in part because they are harnessing incredible skills to a purpose where they know that millions of people can be helped. And what they'll tell me is that as long as they feel that they've got a President and somebody who's providing some air cover, there's no system that they can't get in there and work and change and make it significantly better.

So part of my job is to try to institutionalize that over the next several years. And I want to make sure that the next President and the federal government from here on out is in constant improvement mode and we're constantly bringing in new talent and new ideas to solve some of these big problems. It can be done. It requires some effort, but everything requires some effort.

Moderator Smith: Because, Mr. President, you know, I talked to tech people in advance of your coming, and I said, if you were asked by the President or by the administration to come in and work with them, what would the conditions need to be that would make it possible? And they said, well, we would need some kind of a carve-out, some kind of flexibility from rules and regulations. We would be willing to work with the government, and maybe we would then donate back the IP to the public sector. Or if we want to give some of the employees from our payroll the opportunity to work in government, maybe we could get -- as you would with another kind of donation -- some sort of a tax break back. We'd be willing to work, but the government would have to come at least a little bit in our direction. You're saying you're willing to do that?

President Obama: Well, I'm not saying I'm willing to do it; I'm saying we're doing it.

Moderator Smith: You're doing it now -- yes, sir.

President Obama: It is currently happening. And the opportunities are there. But I want to focus on the fact that there are different ways for people here to get engaged. It's not just you coming in -- although we want to create a pipeline where there's a continuous flow of talent that is helping to shape the government. The other thing that we're doing, though, is we're also convening people to solve problems, and they may in their existing roles be able to work together to make a huge difference.

I'll give you a specific example. Before I came in here, I met with an incredible group of people -- entrepreneurs, moviemakers, organizations, tech leaders -- to talk about how we make a real difference on countering violent extremism.

It's not enough if we're going to defeat ISIL just to take out their leadership or to control certain territories, if, in the virtual world, they are consistently reaching kids here in the United States or elsewhere in the world and recruiting them and twisting their minds to do terrible things. We've got to be able to penetrate that.

For good reasons, we don't want the government to be the lead on that. First of all, we're not credible with the people who might be receiving those messages. Second of all, it's dangerous if the government gets in the business of propaganda. So what I said to them was we'll help convene and put you guys in a room together. Where there are resources that are necessary, we can help provide it. But, essentially, you figure out how we can reach young people who might be vulnerable to extremist messages.

You tell us, based on the analytics and the data and the algorithms that you're working with on a day-to-day basis to sell products, what is it that's going to really penetrate here. How can we amplify powerful stories that are already taking place so that there are platforms that can reach as many people as possible?

Moderator Smith: So whether you solve the problem or they solve the problem, it's all good?

President Obama: Exactly. I've give you a second example, and that is the issue of voting -- I mentioned this earlier. We're the only advanced democracy in the world that makes it harder for people to vote.   No, I hear laughing, but it's sad. We take enormous pride in the fact that we are the world's oldest continuous democracy, and yet we systematically put up barriers and make it as hard as possible for our citizens to vote. And it is much easier to order pizza or a trip than it is for you to exercise the single most important task in a democracy, and that is for you to select who is going to represent you in government.

Now, I think it's important for a group like this, as we come up to an election, regardless of your party affiliation, to think about how do we redesign our systems so that we don't have 50 percent or 55 percent voter participation on presidential elections, and during off-year congressional elections, you've got 39 or 40 percent voting.

Moderator Smith: Mr. President, you're in the state with the worst voter turnout in the country over the last few years.

President Obama: By coincidence.

Moderator Smith: We would take 55 percent tomorrow if we could get it.

President Obama: There is a reason I'm bringing this up.   But it's not just Texas. And so one of the things that we're doing is engaging folks who are already doing interesting work in the online space, how can we create safe, secure, smart systems for people to be able to vote much easier online, and what are the technologies to help people get aware of what they're voting about, who they're voting for -- that's, again, an issue where you don't want the federal government engineering all that. But what we can do is to have the incredible talent that's represented in this auditorium really spend time thinking about that and getting to work on it.

Moderator Smith: But governments, Mr. President, governments need to play a role in it. They have to pass legislation that enables some of these things.

President Obama: Yes.

Moderator Smith: So in Texas, again, a state with terrible voter turnout every time, we broke records on primary day but we still had the second worst voting age participation of any state that's voted so far. We can't get out of our own way. You need, in Texas, legislation that enables this. We won't even allow people to register to vote -- register to vote, not vote -- register online in Texas -- register online. We can pay our taxes, we can hold our phone up at the supermarket to pay with our credit card, but somehow online voter registration is perceived to be insecure, or same-day registration.

President Obama: It's not insecure. It's done because the folks who are currently governing the good state of Texas -- aren't interested in having more people participate.

So obviously you've got to make a political argument about why this is important, and not every state is going to move along the same direction. But I will tell you that if we can create more and more models that show that if made easier, more people vote, and that it is seamless and that it is secure, and jurisdictions that are willing to adopt and support these new mechanisms are in place, and if we are building more models of civic engagement and using the tools and technology that we're using to buy things to participate in self-governance, then over time -- look, Texas is never going to be an early adapter of what I'm talking about here.   But over time, pressure builds for us to create systems that make government more responsive and make it work better.

Moderator Smith: Let me stay with Texas and touch on something you alluded to earlier -- that there are a lot of people in the world today who don't like government, don't trust government, don't think government can do good. You are in Texas, the hating-on-government capital of the Western world, right? We hate government so much we'd rather have no government, except we then wouldn't have anybody to sue. So we need government for at least one reason. How do you change the perception that government can do good at a moment when people have decided government can't do good?

President Obama: Well, part of it is the fact that when government does great things, we take it for granted and it's not a story. I mean, every day, government is delivering for everybody in this room, whether you know it or not. I can find the fiercest libertarian in the room who despises every level of government, thinks it's all corrupt, but they're checking the weather on their phone, and lo and behold, it turns out that there's a government satellite out there that is facilitating that.

Moderator Smith: That's government.

President Obama: And they'd be really irritated if they couldn't figure out whether it was going to be 70 and sunny or 60 and rainy tomorrow. But that's not reported as government. We just take for granted, of course, there are roads, and, of course, there's a geo-satellite system and, of course, we have Special Forces who are making sure that folks aren't blowing up our buildings. Well, part of our task is to tell a better story about what government does.

Now, government is often its own worst enemy in the sense that it has to also be more responsive where people interact in a direct way with government. I've said before that I could change the politics of America faster than just about anything if I could just take control of all the DMVs in the country. Because if somebody goes to get their license renewed and it takes them two hours --

Moderator Smith: And they walk away frustrated.

President Obama: -- and everybody is kind of surly --

Moderator Smith: Right.

President Obama: -- that's their impression of government.

Moderator Smith: Yeah.

President Obama: Or if their primary interaction with government is the IRS, you just don't have a good association with government when you're writing that check. But if we make it easier, if it's being done online, if suddenly, you have the capacity to interact with government in a way that also gives you some feedback about how you're tax dollars are being spent or why this is important, or what you're doing, so that it's a two-way exchange as opposed to something that feels distant and that you have no control over, then people's attitudes change.

Now, here's the problem, and this is why politics matter. If there are those who despise government -- oftentimes because the absence of government allows them to pollute, or keep as much money as they can, or not have to answer to consumers who are complaining about their practices -- if they are controlling those who are currently in government and government gets starved of resources, then it can be a self-reinforcing notion that, in fact, government doesn't work because it's being starved.

A great example of this, by the way, I met with financial regulators this week to just get a report back on how we're doing on Wall Street reform. One of the things that the left and the right agree on is that after the financial crisis, nothing changed, and all those folks on Wall Street who had done these terrible things just got away with it, and we didn't change the system and it's just the way it is now. Well, the truth of the matter is, actually, a lot changed. The banks have been forced to capitalize much more. Some of the shoddy practices have been shut down. We set up a Consumer Finance Protection Bureau that prevents some of the mortgage practices -- that had ended up not only hurting individuals but also destabilizing the entire system. Derivatives now have to be set up on a clearinghouse platform that allows oversight in a way that didn't exist before.

The financial system is much more stable than it used to be. And too big to fail actually is much less likely, because if somebody engages in reckless practices we can now unwind them without them bringing down the entire system.

Moderator Smith: So how come we don't know it then?

President Obama: Well, first of all, that's not a story that is interesting to people. What's more interesting is a cynical view that terrible things happened and nothing got changed. And that's how it gets reported both in popular culture as well as in the media.

But the second thing that's happened is, where it's not -- where we still have work to do in this space -- the main reason we have work to do in this space is because this Congress has prevented oversight agencies like the FCC and the CFTC from having enough staff and resources to be able to enforce as well as they could some of the laws and the rules that are put in place.

And so we go back to the need for civic engagement. We cannot solve the problems in government and we cannot solve the problems that we face collectively as a society unless we, the people, are paying attention. And in an age in which people are getting information through digital platforms, through the Internet, where people's attention spans have shrunk, it is critical that all of you who are shaping this environment are spending time thinking about how are we getting people -- how are we getting citizens engaged, and you, yourselves have to be engaged and spend some time thinking about it.

It doesn't mean you have to do it full-time. It doesn't mean that you have to run for office yourself. But it does mean that whatever your field is, there is a way right now for you to engage and participate to take this democracy back in ways that we have not seen in a very long time.

Moderator Smith: What you're preaching, Mr. President, again -- nobody will take issue with the idea of more civic engagement in a digital age. But the question is whether everybody, all of us in this country, are in the same digital age, right?

You're in a state that is seeing rapid changes in its population. We'll soon be Hispanic majority. Well, in this state, as in a lot of other states, the digital divide -- access to Wi-Fi, access to devices continues to be an enormous problem. Fifty percent of adults in Hispanic households have no access to Internet at home. Fifty-four percent of African Americans have access, but 46 percent do not. Many more white households have access to the Internet than do non-white households. We know that we have this massive digital divide in this country, in Texas and elsewhere. Shouldn't the government, before we start providing all the civic engagement through the digital space, make sure that everybody is in the digital space first?

President Obama: Which is, actually, exactly what we've been trying to do over the last several years. When we passed the Recovery Act -- the stimulus that was very controversial at the time and that continues to be criticized by the other party, despite the fact that unemployment is now below 5 percent -- and we avoided a Great Depression.   Thanks, Obama.

But embedded in that was a massive investment in making sure that communities that had been left out of broadband and Wi-Fi were reached. And we have made enormous progress in extending more and more Internet access -- high-speed Internet access to communities all across the country.

A second example -- we set up something called ConnectED, where our goal -- and we're on track to meet this by 2018 -- is that 99 percent of classrooms have access to high-speed wireless. And the way we've done that, in part, is through federal spending, but what we've also done is we've partnered with an array of companies.

Moderator Smith: Right, private industries.

President Obama: Private industry has really stepped up. And so part of the task -- you're right that we've got to make sure that, given the power of this space, everybody is plugged in. But one of the great tricks to all this is making sure that whatever government is doing is then supplemented with and enhanced by a private sector and nonprofit sector that are ready to step up. And it's not just, by the way, getting a line in or Wi-Fi there. It's also training teachers. We've set up something called -- well, open book? Somebody out here --

Audience Member: Open eBooks.

President Obama: There you go, Open eBooks.   I knew there was somebody in the audience who'd know about this.   To make sure that kids in places that don't have a lot of books that suddenly they have access to this enormous e-library, and that that becomes folded into the mechanics and the infrastructure that's been set in place.

Moderator Smith: Mr. President, very good, it's important to have wired classrooms, but part of the problem is that 70 percent of homework assignments by one measure, given by teachers, require some Internet access. So it's one thing to wire classrooms; the problem is homes.

There was a story in The New York Times about a month ago that had a couple of kids from McAllen, a brother and sister, standing outside their school building into the wee hours of the night having to do their homework on their phones, using the Wi-Fi from the school after hours because they had no Wi-Fi at home. This is 2016. It just seems crazy.

President Obama: Which is why we've set up something called Opportunity Networks that is going to go into public housing, rural communities, low-income communities to make sure that access is available precisely so those young people can do the work.

Moderator Smith: You're going to try to solve this problem?

President Obama: I am trying to solve every problem. But here --

Moderator Smith: You've got to have a goal, I understand.

President Obama: But here's the point that I want to make. These are solvable problems, but it's not a matter of us passively waiting for somebody else to solve it. And that's part of the mindset that I'm trying to break. I tried to break it back in 2007, 2008, when I ran for this office. As you will recall, the slogan was not "Yes, I can" -- it was "Yes, We Can." And we could sit here and you could list out an array of problems, inequities that have to be addressed. What I'm saying is, number one, government actually works better in so many areas than we give it credit for because we tend to focus on those areas where it's not working as well.

Number two, part of the reason that government doesn't always appear to provide a satisfactory solution is because government has to take on the hardest problems. The private sector doesn't have to figure out how to educate the poorest kids. The private sector doesn't have to figure out how to protect us from a terrorist cell. If you have aging, sick veterans, the private sector may not serve them as well, or to figure out how do we get homeless off the streets.

So the toughest problems are government problems. And finding solutions to those things can take time. And so you're never going to get 100 percent satisfaction the way you might get that perfect cup of coffee, the perfect latte, or the perfect -- the lowest price on your ticket to Cancun -- because these are harder problems.

But the third point that I'm trying to make here is that if we can reconceive of our government so that the interactions and the interplay between private sector, nonprofits, and government are opened up, and we use technology, data, social media in order to join forces around problems, then there's no problem that we face in this country that is not soluble. And the key is to have incredible talent, as is gathered here, to focus on it.

It's not enough just to focus on what's the cool next thing. Part of what we have to do is to figure out how do we use and harness the cool next thing to make sure that everybody in this country has opportunity. And to make sure that we're dealing with our environment in an effective way.

Moderator Smith: I want to use and harness the time we have. We've got 10 minutes left. We started a little late.

President Obama: Nice segue. That was good.

Moderator Smith: Thank you. I appreciate it. Took the baton here, Mr. President.   I took the baton.

President Obama: It was good. It was good.

Moderator Smith: We asked for questions from regular folks through the Texas Tribune website. We've got a few of those. And I want to ask you about a couple of those. Some are related to the topics we've been talking about, and some are not. I'm going to go quickly so that we use the time we have.

A bunch of people wanted me to ask you about Apple and the situation with Apple and the FBI.   You're trying to persuade the tech community that they should work with government. But it looks to the tech community -- at least some in the tech community -- that government is the enemy of the tech community in the way that it's dealing with Apple. Some in the tech community.

The question I want to ask you is, putting aside the specifics of this specific case, the legal fight between the company and the FBI, there are big questions around the idea of how you balance the need for law enforcement to conduct investigations and the needs of citizens to protect their privacy. This is the old privacy versus security debate. Mr. President, where do you come down on the privacy versus security debate?

President Obama: Well, first of all, I can't comment on the specific case. So let's set that aside.

All of us value our privacy, and this is a society that is built on a Constitution and a Bill of Rights and a healthy skepticism about overreaching government power. Before smartphones were invented, and to this day, if there is probable cause to think that you have abducted a child, or that you are engaging in a terrorist plot, or you are guilty of some serious crime, law enforcement can appear before your -- at your doorstep and say, we have a warrant to search your home, and they can go into your bedroom and into your bedroom doors and rifle through your underwear to see if there's any evidence of wrongdoing.

And we agree on that, because we recognize that just like all of our other rights -- freedom of speech, freedom of religion, et cetera -- that there are going to be some constraints that we impose in order to make sure that we are safe, secure and living in a civilized society.

Now, technology is evolving so rapidly that new questions are being asked. And I am of the view that there are very real reasons why we want to make sure that government cannot just willy-nilly get into everybody's iPhones that is full of -- or smartphones that are full of very personal information and very personal data. And let's face it, the whole Snowden disclosure episode elevated people's suspicions of this. So does popular culture, by the way, which makes it appear as if I'm in the Sit Room and I'm moving things --

Moderator Smith: You've been watching Homeland.

President Obama: There's like half a fingerprint and half an hour later, I'm tracking the guy in the streets of Istanbul.

Moderator Smith: It's not really that cool?

President Obama: It turns out it doesn't work that way. Sometimes I'm just trying to get a connection. But, look, that was a real issue. I will say, by the way, that -- and I don't want to go too far afield -- but the Snowden issue vastly overstated the dangers to U.S. citizens in terms of spying, because the fact of the matter is, is that actually our intelligence agencies are pretty scrupulous about U.S. persons, people on U.S. soil. What those disclosures did identify were accesses overseas with respect to people who are not in this country.

A lot of those have been fixed. Don't take my word for it. There was a panel that was constituted, an independent panel that just graded all the reforms that we set up to avoid those charges.

But I understand that that raised suspicions. All right. So we're concerned about privacy.

We don't want government to be looking through everybody's phones, willy-nilly, without any kind of oversight or probable cause or a clear sense that it's targeted at somebody who might be a wrong-doer.

What makes it even more complicated is the fact we also want really strong encryption, because part of us preventing terrorism, or preventing people from disrupting the financial system or our air traffic control system or a whole other set of systems that are increasingly digitalized is that hackers, state or non-state, can just get in there and mess them up.

So we've got two values, both of which are important. Right?

Moderator Smith: Right.

President Obama: And the question we now have to ask is, if technologically, it is possible to make an impenetrable device or system where the encryption is so strong that there's no key, there's no door at all, then how do we apprehend the child pornographer? How do we solve or disrupt a terrorist plot? What mechanisms do we have available to even do simple things like tax enforcement? Because, if, in fact, you can't crack that at all, government can't get in, then everybody is walking around with a Swiss bank account in their pocket -- right? So there has to be some concession to the need to be able to get into that information somehow.

Now, what folks who are on the encryption side will argue is any key whatsoever, even if it starts off as just being directed at one device could end up being used on every device. That's just the nature of these systems. That is a technical question. I'm not a software engineer. It is, I think, technically true, but I think it can be overstated.

And so the question now becomes, we as a society -- setting aside the specific case between the FBI and Apple, setting aside the commercial interests, concerns about what could the Chinese government do with this even if we trusted the U.S. government -- setting aside all those questions, we're going to have to make some decisions about how do we balance these respective risks.

And I've got a bunch of smart people sitting there, talking about it, thinking about it. We have engaged the tech community aggressively to help solve this problem. My conclusion so far is that you cannot take an absolutist view on this. So if your argument is strong encryption, no matter what, and we can and should, in fact, create black boxes, then that I think does not strike the kind of balance that we have lived with for 200, 300 years.

And it's fetishizing our phones above every other value. And that can't be the right answer.

I suspect that the answer is going to come down to how do we create a system where the encryption is as strong as possible, the key is as secure as possible, it is accessible by the smallest number of people possible for a subset of issues that we agree are important. How we design that is not something that I have the expertise to do.

But I caution -- I am way on the civil liberties side of this thing. Bill McRaven will tell you that I anguish a lot over the decisions we make in terms of how to keep this country safe, and I am not interested in overthrowing the values that have made us an exceptional and great nation simply for expediency. But the dangers are real. Maintaining law and order and a civilized society is important. Protecting our kids is important. And so I would just caution against taking an absolutist perspective on this.

Because we make compromises all the time. I haven't flown commercial in a while -- but my understanding is it's not great fun --

Moderator Smith: It's not great. It's not great.

President Obama: -- going through security. But we make the concession because -- it's a big intrusion on our privacy, but we recognize it as important. We have stops for drunk drivers. It's an intrusion, but we think it's the right thing to do. And this notion that somehow our data is different and can be walled off from those other tradeoffs we make I believe is incorrect.

We do have to make sure, given the power of the Internet and how much our lives are digitalized, that it is narrow and it is constrained and that there's oversight. And I'm confident this is something that we can solve. But we're going to need the tech community -- software designers, people who care deeply about this stuff -- to help us solve it.

Because what will happen is if everybody goes to their respective corners and the tech community says, you know what, either we have strong, perfect encryption, or else it's Big Brother and an Orwellian world -- what you'll find is that after something really bad happens, the politics of this will swing and it will become sloppy and rushed, and it will go through Congress in ways that have not been thought through. And then you really will have dangers to our civil liberties because we will have not done -- the people who understand this best and who care most about privacy and civil liberties have sort of disengaged or taken a position that is not sustainable for the general public as a whole over time.

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Moderator Smith: Sadly, Mr. President, the clock is telling me that we're out of time. A lot of things I wanted to ask you. You gave a great answer on that question, and I'm happy to have that be the last bit that we did together. Thank you so much for being here.

President Obama: I'm the President, so I'm going to take one more minute.

Moderator Smith: You will? We'll take it.

President Obama: There are a number of different ways in which all of you can plug into what I've been talking about here today. So if you are interested in figuring out ways to make government services work better, you can go to whitehouse.gov or U.S. Digital Services and find out what they're doing. If you are interested in how we can make sure that classrooms are properly connected, you can plug into what we're doing with ConnectED.

One of my favorite projects that's just gotten started over the last several months is -- diapers are really expensive, and we've actually set up a system whereby through social media and the Internet, non-for-profits are able to make bulk purchases of diapers, save 25 percent on those, so that they can distribute them to low-income moms and families. And it's a convergence of diaper makers and logistics companies and Internet companies. And we sort of convened the thing, but it's not running through a government program.

So whatever your interests are, whatever your passions are, whatever your concerns are, we need you. And I want to underscore the fact that in 10 months I will not have this office. It has been the great privilege of my life, but it's not like I stop caring about the things that I care about right now. And it's not like I'm going to stop being involved in promoting the best, most prosperous, most peaceful, most tolerant, most ecologically responsible America that I can.

I'll be sitting in an audience with you -- and I expect you to step up and get involved, because the country needs you. And if the brainpower and talent that's on display here today and throughout this conference takes up that baton, then I'm going to be really confident about the future of this country.

All right. Thank you, guys.