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001	Speech	Remarks on the Brain Initiative and American Innovation, The White House, April 2, 2013 - From: O'Connor	17	04/01/2013	P6/b6;
002	Speech	Remarks on the Brain Initiative and American Innovation, The White House, April 2, 2013 - From: O'Connor	2	04/01/2013	P6/b6; Transferred

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Subject/Description: **PRESIDENTIAL REMARKS: THE BRAIN INITIATIVE AND
AMERICAN INNOVATION, THE WHITE HOUSE, APR 02 13**

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4/2/13

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O'Connor
6-2549/

P6/b(6)

Remarks of President Barack Obama
The BRAIN Initiative and American Innovation
The White House
April 2, 2013

Good morning, everybody. Thank you, Dr. Collins, for that introduction, and for your leadership at the National Institutes of Health. Today I've invited some very smart people to the White House to talk about a challenge I issued in my State of the Union Address – to grow our economy, create new jobs, and reignite a rising, thriving middle class by investing in one of our core strengths – American innovation.

Ideas are what power our economy. It's what America is all about. We have always been a nation of dreamers and risk takers; people who see what nobody else sees and do what nobody else does. We do innovation better than anybody else – and it makes our economy stronger. When we invest in the best ideas before anybody else, our businesses and our workers can make the best products and deliver the best services before anybody else.

We don't just attract the best scientists and the best entrepreneurs – we invest in their success. We support labs and universities to help them learn and explore. We fund grants to help them turn a dream into reality. We have a patent system to protect their inventions. And we offer loans to help them turn those inventions into successful businesses.

These investments don't always pay off. But when they do, they can change our lives in ways we never could have imagined. Computer chips, GPS technology, the internet, all grew out of government investments in basic research. Businesses have used that technology to create countless new jobs. The founders of Google, for example, got early support from the National Science Foundation. The Apollo project that put a man on the moon also gave us CAT scans.

And every dollar we spent to map the human genome has returned \$140 to our economy.

Dr. Collins helped lead the genome effort, and today he's here to help us announce the next great American project – the BRAIN initiative.

As humans, we can identify galaxies light-years away and study particles smaller than an atom.

But we still haven't unlocked the mysteries of the three-pound lump of matter that sits between our ears. Today, scientists possess the capability to study individual neurons and figure out the main functions of certain areas of the brain. But a human brain contains almost 100 billion neurons making trillions of connections. Dr. Collins says it's like listening to the strings section and trying to figure out what the whole orchestra sounds like.

As a result, we're still unable to cure diseases like Alzheimer's or autism, or fully reverse the effects of a stroke. And the most powerful computer in the world isn't nearly as intuitive as the one we're born with.

The BRAIN initiative will change that by giving scientists the tools they need to get a dynamic picture of the brain in action and better understand how we think, learn and remember.

In the budget I will send to Congress next week, I will propose a significant investment by the National Institutes of Health, DARPA, and the National Science Foundation to help get this project off the ground. I'm directing my bioethics commission to make sure all our research is being done in a responsible way. And we're also partnering with the private sector – including leading companies, foundations and research institutions – to tap the nation's brightest minds and help us reach our goal.

Now, it goes without saying that none of this will be easy. If it was, we would already know everything there is to know about the brain and how it works. But just think about what the world could look like once we do crack this code. Imagine if no family had to feel helpless watching a loved one disappear behind the mask of Parkinson's, or struggle in the grip of epilepsy. Imagine if we could reverse traumatic brain injury or PTSD when our veterans come home from war.

Imagine if someone with a prosthetic limb could play the piano or throw a baseball as well as anyone else. What if computers could respond to our thoughts and language barriers came tumbling down; what if millions of Americans found the new jobs of the future – jobs we haven't even dreamt up yet – because we chose to invest in this project today?

That's why the BRAIN initiative is so important.

And that's also why it's important we replace the across-the-board budget cuts that threaten to set us back before we even get started. A few weeks ago, the directors of some of our national laboratories said these arbitrary cuts – known in Washington-speak as “the sequester” – are so severe and so poorly designed that they will hold back a generation of young scientists.

When our leading thinkers wonder if it still makes sense to encourage young people to get involved in science in the first place – that’s something we should all worry about. We can’t afford to miss these opportunities while the rest of the world races ahead. We have to seize them. I don’t want the next job-creating discovery to happen in China or India or Germany. I want it to happen right here, in the United States of America.

That’s what today is about.

And that's why we're pursuing other "grand challenges" like making solar energy as cheap as coal and making electric vehicles as affordable as ones that run on gas. These are ambitious goals, but they're also achievable. And we're encouraging companies, research universities and other organizations to get involved and help us make progress.

The year before I was born, an American company came out with one of the earliest “minicomputers” – a revolutionary machine that didn’t require its own air conditioning system and only took one person to operate. Each computer was eight feet tall, weighed 1,200 pounds, and cost more than \$100,000.

Today, most of the people in this room have a far more powerful computer in their pocket. Computers have become so small and so universal that most of us can’t imagine life without them.

Millions of Americans work in fields that didn't exist when their parents were born. And Watson – the computer that won Jeopardy – is now being used in hospitals across the country to diagnose diseases like cancer. That's how much progress we've made in my lifetime – and many of yours. That's how fast we're moving.

We can't predict what life will be like 20 or 50 or 100 years down the road.

What we can do is keep investing in the most promising solutions to our toughest problems. I don't want our children or grandchildren to look back on this day and wish we had done more to keep America on the cutting edge. I want them to look back and be proud that we took this chance; that we seized this opportunity. That's the American story. That's who we are.

And if we keep taking bold steps like the one we're taking today to learn about the brain, then I'm confident America will continue to lead the world into that next frontier of human understanding.

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

DRAFT 4/1/13 6pm

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4/2/13

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