

Conclusion

Mars Science Laboratory Curiosity team members celebrate the landing of Curiosity rover on the surface of Mars at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, Aug. 5, 2012.

AP PHOTO/DAMIAN DOVARGANES



We cannot stand idly by and expect our dreams to come true under their own power. The future is not a gift: it is an achievement.

Robert F. Kennedy, Seattle World's Fair, 1962'



Over the past 100 years, the United States became the world's largest economy and its people the world's richest. While it may be tempting to think this success was inevitable, we sell ourselves short when we do not acknowledge that it is the result of the energetic, entrepreneurial, and back-breaking achievements of capable men and women who have worked across a vast democratic expanse.

The next American century will also have to be a series of achievements—not gifts—and our achievements will need to overcome emerging challenges such as increased globalization, climate change, and demographic shifts. But we can still achieve the future that we want if we foster and employ the talents of our capable people.

Growing America's economy means strengthening and growing America's middle class. Economic mobility must be a reality, not just an aspiration, and human capital needs to be cultivated so that we can benefit from the talents and ingenuity of all of our people. That is why we start with the realization that to reach our economic potential, we must activate the 300 million engines of growth in our economy.

But activating the engines alone is not enough. Even cars with superior engines need good roads on which to move forward, free of potholes and with useful and efficient rules that let them run at top speed.

Simply put, for America to lead innovation in the 21st century—as it did in the 20th—we have to make sure that our people are skilled and educated, operating in an economic environment that is conducive to their success and that allows them to compete at home and abroad.

This report lays out policies that can be advanced now. For all of the gridlock in policymaking, many of the policies we should pursue are disarmingly straightforward—

from investing in early childhood to boosting retirement security to repairing our crumbling infrastructure.

Now is the time to talk about these issues, chart a path forward, and act.

Every day, week, and month that we delay represents another lost opportunity to invest for a future return, and each delay exacerbates the inequality that is already proving to be a drain on the middle class and, in turn, on growth.

As progressives, we are optimists. We believe in the spirit of Americans to rise to the challenges we face and to help create a future in which more of our people have a chance to use their talents, and fewer and fewer live in poverty.

Every investment we make as a society must be made with a clear vision of the type of dynamic economy we seek: an innovative and growing economy where, if you work hard, you have a fair shot at attaining the American Dream. That is the challenge—and the enormous opportunity—of activating our 300 million engines of growth. ■

Endnotes

- 1 Robert F. Kennedy, "Address at the Seattle World's Fair" (August 7, 1962), available at <http://www.justice.gov/ag/rfk-speeches/1962/08-07-1962.pdf> (last accessed May 2013).