

Melody Barnes
Remarks for Harlem Children's Zone &
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Good morning everyone!

Thank you Angela for that kind introduction and welcome. You've been such a strong leader and partner in our efforts to tackle some of our nation's toughest challenges. It is always great to share the stage with you and to recognize the integral work of PolicyLink.

And thank you Geoff Canada for inviting me to speak today. I am so pleased to be here to help kick off this exciting event. It is not lost on anyone in this room that Geoff and the Harlem Children's Zone have had a profound effect on the way we strategize about anti-poverty and neighborhood revitalization initiatives. Geoff, you are a true visionary.

It is incredible to see the enthusiasm here this morning! I am told 1400 people have gathered to discuss one mission: "changing the odds" in our neighborhoods. When Geoff wrote to me and told me about this conference, he asked me to help set the context for the two days and tell you more about the President's Administration-wide place-based for improving communities and the lives of the families living in those communities. I think this is an appropriate place to start.

On the campaign trail, the President articulated his new vision for America's neighborhoods, cities and towns, and visited diverse communities around the country. After years as a community organizer, state and U.S. Senator, he was already attuned to the needs and challenges facing our growing cities, surrounding suburbs and rural areas. In fact he spoke in July of 2007 of his experience as a community organizer which took him into the heart of Chicago neighborhoods devastated by steel plant closures. It was then that he confronted extreme poverty so overwhelming and all encompassing that it seemed impossible to escape. This poverty was not a result of a simple lack of money or an unwillingness to work hard, but was a disease that had spread and infected the surrounding city blocks giving those that lived there little chance for more than sad survival. It shook him and made him ask: how can we let this happen here in America?

Well, in his speech on the campaign trail -- which (without coincidence I suspect) was titled "Changing the Odds for Urban America" -- he answered: we can't. We can't let poverty like that sicken our cities and our nation. We can't let the hopelessness and isolation of poverty permeate our communities and determine our children's future. That isn't who we are as Americans. This isn't part of our values.

The good news is that this is no longer only a campaign vision but it's now an Administration-wide strategy for targeting neighborhoods of concentrated poverty and comprehensively providing the resources, the tools, and the commitment needed to change the odds. Building a future of opportunity in every community, for every child across America is a major focus of the President's domestic agenda. Neighborhood boundaries shouldn't limit opportunity for any child -- potential, not place, should determine what's possible.

This place-based strategy touches every aspect of life -- education, health, housing,

energy, and transportation – and these elements should be viewed as part of a comprehensive whole.

None should be viewed as a separate or competing form of policy. Rather, we are approaching a place-based strategy as form of delivery for the various policies of the Administration in order to ensure that federal investments are integrated, and delivered in a way best that strengthens and connects neighborhoods.

While there will never be an easy one-size-fits-all solution to poverty, there are effective programs out there. But the most effective strategy is one that considers a child as part of a family in a vibrant community. Those strategies encompass education, health care, housing, energy, and transportation. Healthy, strong neighborhoods are much more than just the brick and mortar of houses. When we envision the future of our communities, we aim to build them healthier, safer, more economically robust and prosperous. By forging unprecedented partnerships across the federal government, we are able to put our focus not on programs and policies, but on people and places.

To do that, we're working with the President's cabinet – he has chosen a stellar group of nationally-known and highly respected innovators including New York City's former Housing Preservation and Development head Shaun Donovan – and we are starting to break down the silos that have historically separated federal agencies and are beginning to rebuild our communities while advancing economic opportunity in our urban and metropolitan areas.

Already we are seeing this approach take shape. At the Department of Education, Secretary Arne Duncan's team is developing the Promise Neighborhoods initiative that the President promised during the campaign. The idea is to combat poverty and help youth in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty by addressing their educational, health, and social needs and helping them successfully complete high school and continue on to college and career. The strategy integrates effective school reform with a pipeline of wrap-around family supports and community services for students and their families.

Harlem Children's Zone has been taking a comprehensive, place-based approach for some time now and yielding real results. The President has been so impressed by the program that he made it the cornerstone of his proposal, and he has asked Congress to fund the first stage of the Promise Neighborhoods program beginning this fiscal year. I understand that Secretary Duncan will be here tomorrow to tell you more about the program so I will leave the details to him.

At HUD, Secretary Donovan is leading a parallel neighborhood revitalization effort, Choice Neighborhoods, to align federal housing programs with public education, health services, and social resources. The idea is to provide safe, secure, and affordable homes in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty as well as access to integral public resources such as transportation and quality schools to increase economic opportunities.

And, you should know that Secretary Duncan and Secretary Donovan are collaborating closely on these two initiatives and are expanding the coordination beyond HUD and Education. They are working with Secretary Sebelius to include health services and with Attorney General Holder to address the public safety aspects of neighborhood revitalization.

These are just two of the exciting place-based strategies that my office is helping to coordinate. We are proud that HUD, the Department of Transportation and the Environmental

Protection Agency have formed an interagency partnership -- the Sustainable Communities Partnership that encourages and assists more sustainable development across the country. It starts with asking communities to develop regional “blueprints” that strategically align the transportation, housing, land use, water and environmental infrastructure needs of a region. The idea is to ensure that families of all income levels have a mix of housing options as well as convenient and affordable transportation to jobs, education, retail, and services. The Sustainable Communities Partnership also prioritizes development within existing neighborhoods, including infill development and Brownfield clean-up.

And, not to worry, other agencies like the Department of Commerce, Department of Labor, USDA, the Department of Energy and the Small Business Administration are also involved with place-based strategies such as the regional innovation clusters initiative. This initiative will invest in the clusters of growth and innovation that are springing up across this country and will help spur further development by building on the strongest industries, skills, and assets of a particular region pursuant to an integrated plan developed by a regional consortium of leaders. Because what we’ve found time and time again that when we take the different assets that are scattered throughout our communities – whether it’s a skilled workforce or leading firms or institutions of higher education – and bring them all together so they can learn from one another and share ideas, you get the kind of creative thinking that doesn’t come in isolation.

With these new, integrated initiatives, the President also wants to be sure that all of our federal dollars targeted to urban areas are spent effectively on the highest-impact programs. As part of that effort, the President directed my office, the Domestic Policy Council, along with the new White House Office of Urban Affairs, the National Economic Council, and the Office of Management and Budget to do the first comprehensive interagency review in 30 years to analyze and improve the federal government’s approach to funding of urban and metropolitan areas. This place-based review will allow us to be more strategic in our approach to revitalizing our cities and suburbs. The old ways of federal government just won’t do.

Our work must also be integrated across sectors too. We think it’s critical to not only connect federal agencies and partner with state and local governments, but also to engage in public-private partnerships so that we can pool our collective resources and maximize impact. Because we are all tasked with the work of meeting our nation’s challenges, the President has called this an all-hands-on-deck moment – one where the strengths and talents of individuals, nonprofit organizations, foundations, and corporations, as well as government are combined to find the solutions we need.

On June 30th, the President hosted an event at the White House which highlighted innovative community solutions and reiterated his commitment to improving our neighborhoods and our nation through supporting the ingenuity, energy and ideas of people from every sector. Without question, the federal government has important responsibilities and a role to play – sometimes as convener or as a funder, as a megaphone or a partner – but we also know that the best solutions are often local in origin. This Administration knows how important it is to work with those on the ground who can best define what they need and how to get things done. These partnerships will lead to more innovation, entrepreneurship, and real economic benefits like new jobs and higher wages.

We are creating a policy climate to catalyze innovation while we’re searching cities and towns for the smartest, most effective solutions to our nation’s problems. We can then invest

federal funds in these programs that work – programs that are making a real difference on the local level that could be replicated in communities all across the country. We’re not looking to make marginal or incremental progress here. We recognize that limited taxpayer dollars need to be directed at efforts that have evidence that they work. We’re looking for programs that are nothing short of transformative.

That is the mission of our newly created Social Innovation Fund at the Corporation for National and Community Service. We believe that somewhere out there is the next Harlem Children’s Zone, or Teach for America – a program with the potential to bring about unprecedented change – and we want to find it and support it.

And at the Department of Education we’ve started the \$650 million Investing in Innovation Fund -- or i3 Fund. i3 will invest in high-impact, potentially transformative education interventions -- ranging from new ideas with huge potential to those that have had proven results. School districts and nonprofit organizations working together will be encouraged to apply and will be measured on their ability to achieve results – helping students master rigorous standards, closing achievement gaps, increasing graduation rates, or recruiting and retaining effective teachers and principals.

We absolutely must rely on evidence-based strategies if we really want to create the results that will change the odds. We want to support and scale the programs that really work and eliminate those that are redundant or ineffective. One of the reasons that Harlem Children’s Zone has been so successful is its unwavering focus on measuring results and documenting the impact of its programs. The use of data to manage the pursuit of its goals has set HCZ apart from other anti-poverty programs.

In order to invest in what works we need to have metrics and evaluation that will give us better information and an understanding of how to determine what works. To this end, my office, the Domestic Policy Council, and Office of Management and Budget have begun a process within government to develop common standards for metrics and evaluation across agencies and to identify the best way to fund successful programs. This process will include working with experts, foundations and academics to set new standards for metrics, evaluation and results within the federal government.

As part of this effort, OMB issued a memorandum to all federal agencies in October that is designed to increase public access to data on the effectiveness of government programs and to encourage agencies to develop a stronger evidence base connected to their programs.

And, as you well know, we need to invest in the next generation of leaders that will make service a part of their life; that is why the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act will grow Americorps from 75,000 to 250,000- to develop those young leaders who will become the next Geoff Canada, Angela Glover Blackwell, or Wendy Kopp.

We are excited about all of these undertakings in effort to change the odds in our neighborhoods. It’s been a busy ten months – but this is only the beginning. This work will be unfolding over the next few years because building effective, coordinated, and sustainable anti-poverty efforts does not happen overnight, as Geoff and Angela know all too well. It won’t be easy, but the needs are too urgent. We all know the value of a Promise Neighborhood because we each grew up in one, myself and the President included. That is why this is such a priority for the Administration and it is why we need your energy...your input...your ideas in order to make these initiatives work. So as I close, I want to thank you for all that you do towards these goals,

and I look forward to working with all of you in the months and years ahead.

Have a great conference.