

Opening Remarks of Gavin Newsom at San Diego Town Hall

I thank each and every one of you for coming out to my 12th town hall. I've been doing this all over the state of California. We were up in Santa Monica last night competing with St. Patrick's Day, which is not an easy thing to compete with. I joked earlier today that I would have been wise to say it was an open bar – we would have had more folks.

But we did have over 600 people show up last night in Santa Monica. And we've been getting hundreds of people all over the state of California. I haven't just been into progressive parts of the state like Santa Monica, though I confess I've been down to Santa Cruz, which you hardly can call a conservative part of the state. But we've been in parts of the Central Valley, Stockton and the San Joaquin valley. I was up in Placer County, which arguably is not just one of the most conservative counties in California but one of the most conservative counties in the United States of America.

We've been talking to people from every conceivable walk of life, from every diverse background – folks that speak, as Todd said, those 30 plus languages. You know what's amazing – and it probably doesn't surprise any of you in this room – for all the professed differences we say or claim we have, whether we're on the coastal part of our state or the northern part of our state or in the inland part of our state, I haven't experienced it yet. I haven't heard it. I haven't seen it. People are talking about health care – regardless if they're Republicans or Democrats. They're talking about education. They're talking about the environment. It may not be the same kind of environmental conversation we will have tonight here in San Diego as in the Central Valley – but it sure as heck has to do with water. You're up in the Sierras, it's about the snow pack, though I confess we can't legislate snow or rain, but we can do something about conveyance. We can do something about storage. We can have a conversation about a population that's growing and water needs that will be increasingly part of the narrative and the controversy in this state. Something I know all of you are intimately familiar with in San Diego County. We've been talking of course about jobs and the need for an economic development strategy and a work force development strategy in this state. We've been talking about people's insecurities and concerns. I was with the mayor of Stockton. We were walking in one of the projects built there a few years ago, when things were going great. Remember, that was just how many months ago – seven, eight months ago – it never would turn bad. And folks were buying homes there – literally ten months ago – for five hundred plus thousand dollars. One of the projects there with hundreds of housing units, you walk by and every other home is foreclosed. And the biggest concern the Mayor told me, the biggest concern she has, is kids going on Google Maps, cross-referencing the Google Map with foreclosures so they can bring their skateboards and drain the pool and take over the backyards. And now she's concerned about keeping the properties in top shape at peril of everyone else's housing prices will drop even further. And

guess what – they can't sell homes there for more than \$130,000. Those are the same homes that were being bought just ten months ago for close to half a million dollars. Folks have mortgages of \$300,000, \$350,000. I recognize – you all recognize – that these are challenging times – again, fearful times. But my spirit of the night is a spirit of optimism. We are much more united than the politics and punditry will suggest. Folks all over the state are feeling like you are in this part of the state. I certainly am feeling like a lot of folks I was talking to in the back room just a moment ago. The issues are remarkable in terms of how they bind us together. So the question is: what are we going to do about them? You've come to these events before, I'm sure. And you've heard politicians say "it's time in this country and in this great state for universal health care." And some of you will applaud. The politician will say "exactly!" and smile and feel good about the moment and that interaction – then walk away. Maybe that politician will even get elected – Democrat or Republican. Just think back, you've had Republican governors, you've had democratic governors; you've had democratic legislatures, you've had Republican legislatures. We've had Republican presidents, most assuredly, and now we have a Democratic President. The point is, in the last 30 or 40 years, you've watched the roll of those without health insurance continue to grow.

All the rhetoric in the world hasn't solved the health care crisis. Now, we may have a President who gets that and actually can deliver on that promise, but in the interim, what are we going to do about it? And that was exactly the question we were faced with in San Francisco. "We've heard that speech before, Mayor," they say. We know the state of California's got 6.6 million uninsured people. We know the U.S. has 46 million uninsured – 45.9 million based on the last count. We know co-pays are up, we know insurance premiums are up and we know folks with health insurance don't know if they can continue to afford it. Or for those of you in small business, if you can continue to stay in business because of your employer health care and the costs associated to support your employees, that you want to support but you don't know if you can continue to support. In San Francisco, we decided to stop talking about it and do something about it. We became the first city in the United States of America – not to put a plan together; not to have a fancy press conference; not to talk about it – but to actually begin the process of solving this problem. See we've figured out something you already know. And politicians need to pay attention to this. It is cheaper to invest in your health than it is to treat your sickness. Yet our health care system is designed the other way. You know this. But we don't do anything about it. \$.96 of every health care dollar, you know where it goes. It goes to treat people's sickness. Only 4 cents – it's actually closer to three cents – goes to prevention, to wellness, to health. That doesn't make sense. So in San Francisco we put together a task force, a working group. We got Labor Unions, we got business, big business, small business. We got academia. We got enlightened members of our city council. One guy who worked on this ran against me for mayor – talk about a team of rivals! And we all sat there, across our differences, and we worked out this plan.

Sixty-five percent of those who were previously uninsured are now enrolled in our health care plan in San Francisco, regardless of pre-existing condition. Regardless of their ability to pay, and let me say, regardless of their status – folks with HIV and AIDS, folks with diabetes, folks with chronic diseases, folks with Hepatitis C, folks from every conceivable background. So when people say, “well, it can’t be done,” Come to San Francisco. I don’t think it can be done; I know it can be done. We’ve made something happen. We’ve worked together across our differences. And we’re beginning to reconcile. You may have seen 60 minutes. There was an interesting piece – Alice Waters. Todd said talk about nutrition out there – and you’ve got a chef’s outfit on so I know you care about this! We planted a large vegetable garden – I’ll admit it! – in front of our city hall. A symbolic and substantive way we have got to raise awareness about our eating and drinking problem in our city and in our state. We have got a serious eating and drinking problem. We have a true epidemic. We use that phrase all the time but it’s real one of childhood obesity. And when you see a young child drinking a big gulp of soda – some 64 oz. of Coke or Pepsi (with respect, I like Coke and Pepsi, but in moderation) – that’s a drinking problem.

We need to educate people about what that’s doing to our youth. We have done so much on this. Not only have we built a big garden out there and now done dozens of permanent gardens around the city, we put salad bars into all of our public high schools. We have kids eating broccoli and smiling. I don’t know if they know what it is! Focus on prevention. Focus on wellness. Focus on that connection between our urban poor and rural and suburban agriculture, and our heritage and our roots. 80% of what we need is produced within a few hundred square miles of where we are sitting right here today. Yet we take stuff that’s produced locally and we ship it and get it fresh frozen from overseas back on our plate. You’re going to go home tonight and you’re going to probably eat a meal, an average meal by the way that’s consumed in this country, that’s traveled some 1400 miles to your plate. How does that make sense – in one of the most agriculturally robust states in the world? We have to change that framing. So I want to offer that as a point of consideration tonight for discussion – healthcare, the issue of prevention and nutrition. Two others that I’d like to spark your imagination because these come up at every town hall we’re holding all over the state of California – and that is education, and the crisis of education. I don’t think there is a more important issue in the state of California because to me this connects to everything else. President Obama gets it. He has an economic stimulus strategy; he’s got health care reform; and he’s got education reform. You cannot have one without the other. The interdependence is self-evident. You know this. You can have the fanciest school in the world, the best principal, WIFI technology, the latest flat-screens, you can have motivated teachers, we can give you – you want merit pay – we’ll give it to you in this hypothetical example. You have enthusiastic unions, you’ve got a great PTA and the parents are connected. But if you got a kid that’s growing up in a housing unit that was built in the 1950’s in public housing, in and around a toxic

waste dump, and that kid's sharing the bathroom with 4 or 5 members of their family – with a bathroom that doesn't have ventilation (this was built in the 1950's, supposed to be torn down in the 1960's and 70's for all of our returning GI's and it's still standing) and there's mold and mildew, not on the shower curtains, but below the floor joints and behind the sheetrock, I don't care how fancy your school is, if that kid comes to school with asthma they're not going to get educated. You cannot deal with the issue of education – humbly from my perspective – good people may disagree, without looking at the impact in terms of economic justice, in terms of housing, in terms of our environment, in terms of reconciling economic disadvantage that some of our students have when they enter into those classrooms. We spend nine billion dollars a year to educate three million people out of our 6.2 million kids in public schools that are quote unquote “economically disadvantaged.” We have forty-five programs and we are failing miserably. So when I think of public education and reform, that's where I think we need to go first. We need to address this issue more broadly. I do truancy visits. This is not something Mayors tend to do. I show-up at people's homes with principals and knock on their door. And I was just last week at a home of a mother in our Excelsior District in San Francisco. She's got six kids. Four of them she hasn't seen in years, one of them ran away and one of them she had missed some 36 out of 39 days of school. I was with her principal and I walked in and met the mother. Some folks say that we have to go after truants by prosecuting their parents and you know part of me said "maybe that's a solution" until I started doing these truancy visits and I started realizing the school district is never going to solve the problem of drop-outs and truants. Not if we have more examples like this.

We finally tracked down the young child who was missing school. She actually, remarkably, according to her mom, answered her phone. And I got on the phone, she didn't believe it, but we finally worked through that it was me and I said, "why haven't you been at school?" She said, “it's hard for me to say.” I said, “why?” and she replied, “I've been helping my sister.” And I said, “what's going on with your sister?” “Well, she's fourteen.” And I said, "she's fourteen, how's she doing? She's at another school?" “Well, she hasn't been going to school.” And I asked "why?" She said "she's pregnant."

Here's a sixteen year old taking care of her younger fourteen-year old sister who's pregnant. She also has to take care of her mom who has four other kids she doesn't communicate with because her mom has got serious depression, which was self-evident when we came to the house. That's a family in crisis. The schools are not going to solve the needs of those kids in isolation. School reform is about community reform. And it's about connecting the dots and that interdependence to someone's health, to their environment and then addressing the underlying causes of poverty and the like. So this a topic that I like to discuss if you have interest tonight in terms of how you see that manifesting and how you reflect on that. It is long overdue to begin to move away from being 47th, 48th, with these new cuts,

who knows? We may be 49th in per-pupil spending and continuing to argue about it. We have got to do something about it. And, with all due respect, I don't see the world changing dramatically, where Sacramento's all of a sudden going to spend millions more in public education to get us to the median of per-people spending any time soon.

What are we going to do in the interim? Let me tell you about what we've been doing. The city and county of San Francisco is the only city in the state of California with universal pre-school. We doing it, we're not talking about it. That's where you need to start. As we address these community issues, let's deal with early childhood education. We've got to prepare these kids for kindergarten. You want deal with the achievement gap for African Americans and Latinos? A serious crisis; you have got to deal with it by focusing on preparing these kids for kindergarten. It's too late in many cases if you wait until 6th grade. We don't have the resources to solve that, but we do have the resources and the means to deal with early childhood education. Again, I don't think we can do it; I know we can do it. We're doing it. We also have done something, remember the old arts education that some of us used to get? And remember, you would get dance and music? I mean, not all of us are fancy students that get straight A's in math, engineering and science. Some of us are a little more creative. Some of us, I know intimately, I see someone every morning in the mirror when I'm shaving that may have been one of those students that had severe dyslexia, had a learning disability. I wasn't outperforming anybody. I was taking classes Monday, Wednesday, Friday, did it almost through college. I say almost through because it was just the first year of college that I was taking these extra classes. Those are the kids that need that little extra help. They may have a different attribute that may excel in arts and dance and theater and music. Wells those are the kids that aren't getting the support because those are the programs we're cutting first. You know that. No Child Left Behind is leaving behind 58 billion dollars – that's a slogan for education, you know the rhetoric. A lot of politicians say 'it's time for change' and then nothing changes. I don't think we have a President that is going too long on rhetoric. I think we do have someone who's finally going to change things. But in the interim, what are we going to do about it? So we decided in San Francisco to fund arts education; every child, every classroom, K-12 in the CCSF. We stepped in and funded it. The city paid for it. Just do it! Stop talking about it. Make it happen. Remember the nurses and doctors? Good luck. I don't know how many of you get to go to school and see a nurse or a doctor now. I was reminded by my dad – he said 'oh I know you had a nurse and doctor.' I said 'how do you know?' He replied, 'after every recess you had that one class and you always faked that you were sick because you didn't want to go. You would always call me to say that you were sick.'

So he reminded me that I knew about my nurse and doctor, but most schools nowadays, they don't have it. So again, we decided to step up, step in, stop talking about it and we put in what we call wellness centers. Not only do we deal with

physical health needs, but to deal with adolescent health needs. I think all of us recognize that we need to recognize behavior health, especially adolescent behavioral health: people with bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, paranoia, and people that are severely depressed. And we're proud of that. We think it's a model because what we're doing is we're bringing the hospitals, the community-based organizations into the schools. We're bringing the arts and dance and theater organizations into the schools. We're bringing pre-school and child care programs into the schools. We're anchoring the community; our schools are community centers. We need to start building partnerships and capacities.

They're not silos that can be just funded with Prop 98 exclusively. It's not enough. We're not going to solve the education crisis in isolation. We need to build capacity: public-public partnerships. Not just public-private partnerships. Building capacities between cities and counties, community-based organization and institutions of higher learning. Bringing that capacity to bear and augmenting and subsidizing those cuts or finding to augment those cuts that we're all experiencing in public education. And by the way, I don't know if you know this, we have a rainy day fund in San Francisco, did this a year ago. Our bond rating was just upgraded at the same time the state of California's bonds were downgraded – now the lowest bond rating in America. They were not just celebrating Mardi Gras in LA, they were celebrating their bond rating now being 2nd worst in the U.S. California now being the lowest bond rating. Not much to celebrate for us. That's why we had a quiet and safe Mardi Gras for the first time in a few years, at least up north.

Because we had that Rainy Day Fund, because of the Board of Supervisors, which I was a member of at the time, that put it on the ballot. Guess what we were able to do? Just as we sent out all those pink slips – some of you are teachers – some of you may have gotten one of those pink slips with all those education cuts, we were able to commit to the school district enough money using our Rainy Day Fund to guarantee that none of our teachers were laid off. Seriously valuing that commitment to public schools, not rhetorically. I say all this not just to impress you, I mean that, I want to impress upon you that we can do more and we can do better. Don't limit your beliefs, don't allow the cynicism, don't allow the punditry to allow you to accept the status quo. We're the wealthiest state in America. We're the 8th largest economy on the planet. We have 140 plus billion dollar budget. We are a wealthier state than San Francisco is a wealthy city. We have structural budget imbalances, we have set-asides and entitlements, we have Prop 13, we have high taxes, but so does San Francisco. So does San Diego County, so does Imperial County, so does LA county. So does Placer County, so does San Joaquin County. So do the folks in San Fernando Valley. Don't accept the proposition that we can't do more and do better. So tonight, again in that spirit of optimism, I'd like to engage in a dialogue and conversation about what you think we can do more and do better on issues as large as education and a small as foster care reform and work that you think we need to do in child care reform. Things you

think we should be doing better in the prisons. I look forward to having that conversation tonight because we need to. Or issues associated with the environment, which, of course, drive my passion. There is no more progressive and environmental city in America than San Francisco and we will do the same of the state of California, in terms of solar programs, wave programs, wind, and recycling, electric vehicles, and others. So those are my thoughts, hopefully to get you thinking. I want to talk about what matters to you, what's important to you, large and very minute issues. And don't happen to think that potholes aren't an important issue; that may be your issue, why you're here. I want to talk to Todd about that crosswalk later tonight.