

Pelosi: 'A New Era of American Innovation'

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) gave this policy speech on Dec. 2 at Harvard University, on "A New Era of American Innovation and Competition." The event was sponsored by the John F. Kennedy School of Government's Institute of Politics Forum. Subheads have been added by EIR.



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Rep. Nancy Pelosi

Two weeks ago in Washington, on behalf of the Democrats in the House of Representatives, I unveiled an Innovation Agenda, a Commitment to Competitiveness to Keep America Number One.

It is indeed appropriate to talk about innovation here today, because Massachusetts has always been the source of so much independent thinking and innovation.

All Americans are inheritors of a tradition of innovation. The United States owes its very existence to entrepreneurial ideas. Our Founders had confidence that they were part of change in the world, and they had great faith in the future.

That confidence and their faith in the future are reflected

on the Great Seal of the United States, where they included these words in Latin: “*novus ordo seclorum*”—“A new order for the centuries.”

Imagine their vision. In establishing that new order, our founders broadened our horizons, expanded our country, and imagined a better world. They also recognized that it is the responsibility of each generation to make America a better place for the next—for our posterity.

It was in that tradition, and with the same confidence, imagination, and faith in the future, that the President for whom this great institution is named challenged our nation to set our sights even higher than before.

The Vision of Kennedy’s Space Effort

As President Kennedy said in committing our nation to send a man to the Moon, “The vows of this nation can only be fulfilled if we are first, and therefore, we intend to be first. Our leadership in science and in industry, our hopes for peace and security, our obligations to our selves as well as others, all require us to make this effort.”

In answering President Kennedy’s call to leadership in science and industry, America built the world’s most vibrant economy and became the world leader in scientific discovery and innovation.

World economic and innovative leadership have continually been defined by American genius. Every advance once thought impossible has been achieved by Americans: splitting the atom, landing a man on the moon, mapping the human genome, and transmitting information around the globe in an instant.

Each of these discoveries and inventions launched new industries, created good jobs, and triggered even further innovation.

We promoted an entrepreneurial culture, creating the most powerful public private partnership in the history of the world by investing in long-term, high risk ideas.

All of these factors made America the breeding ground for the innovations and inventions that increased our prosperity, enhanced our lives, and protected and advanced our freedoms.

Unprecedented Challenges

That dynamic and virtuous cycle of innovation is what secured our status as world leader, and that status has remained unchallenged—until now.

Today, the world has changed dramatically—in ways that pose unprecedented challenges to our economic well-being. The underdeveloped countries of yesterday can become the formidable competitors of tomorrow—or even today.

Those countries are following what has been the United States’ blueprint for decades, and which resulted in our preeminence.

As others have copied our blueprint, we have departed from it. They are investing heavily in improving their educational systems, and creating world-class universities, particu-

larly in science and technology. We have fewer students studying math and science, and fewer qualified teachers of math and science than we need.

We will graduate 70,000 engineers this year. India will graduate 350,000 engineers, while China will graduate 600,000.

They are making a commitment to long-term research and development. We are allowing that commitment to falter. Our federal support of basic research peaked in 1987, and has been flat or falling ever since.

They are utilizing cutting-edge technologies to propel themselves forward. South Korea is an incubator for new innovation and leads the world in broadband penetration. We now rank 16th in the world in broadband penetration.

Even if the United States were following our blueprint for success, we would still face these challenges from abroad. But we aren’t, and that only compounds the problem.

Democrats believe that together, America can do better. That is why, over the past several months, we sought out the best possible thinking on how to secure America’s place as the world leader in innovation.

We went outside of Washington, and met with leaders and CEOs from many fields: academia, venture capital, and entrepreneurs from the high-tech, biotech, and telecommunications sectors who are creating the jobs of tomorrow.

We held forums with these leaders here in Boston, as well as other forums in Silicon Valley, Seattle, Chicago, Northern New Jersey, North Carolina’s Research Triangle, and we will hold more.

In each of these forums, my colleagues and I were invigorated by the freshness of the participants’ thinking, and the depth of their commitment to the future. They took pride in the amazing history, power, and creativity of America’s economic model, and the inventiveness of the private sector.

Many credited much of their success to public investment in education, infrastructure, university research, and institutions like the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and DARPA. But they warned that the commitment of the public sector has not kept pace with America’s challenges in the global economy.

That is why Democrats have challenged Congress and the country to renew our commitment to the public-private partnerships that will secure America’s continued leadership in innovation, and unleash the next generation of discovery, invention, and growth.

In addition to laying down the challenge, we also laid out a series of specific goals, proposals, and timelines that, taken together, chart a clear path to a new era of American leadership and prosperity.

Five Areas of Intervention

Our agenda is divided into five broad categories.

First, we recognize that in a globalized, knowledge-based economy, America’s greatest resource for innovation and

economic growth resides within America's classrooms.

To create a new generation of innovators, our agenda calls for a qualified teacher in every math and science K-12 classroom and we issue a "call to action" to engineers and scientists to join the ranks of America's teachers.

We will add 100,000 new scientists, mathematicians, and engineers to America's workforce in the next four years by providing scholarships, other financial assistance, and private sector opportunities to college students to achieve this goal.

Second, we recognize that independent scientific research provides the foundation for innovation and future technologies. Our agenda will double federal funding for basic research and development in the physical sciences, and promote the public-private partnerships that will translate new ideas into marketable technologies.

For example, grants from the National Science Foundation have funded breakthroughs in everything from the Internet, to fiber optics, to nanotechnology. We commit to doubling this investment.

In addition, we pledge to modernize and make permanent the R&D tax credit. These investments will allow us to pursue the long-term, trailblazing research that gives rise to new advances, spawns new industries, and creates good jobs.

Third, we recognize that the nationwide deployment of high speed, always-on broadband and Internet and mobile communications will fuel the development of millions of new jobs in the United States.

Our agenda guarantees that every American will have affordable access to broadband within five years.

Universal broadband will propel advanced Internet applications, such as distance learning, health IT, video-on-demand, and Voice over IP. Universal broadband—whether it's delivered by Wi-Fi or WiMAX, or hard line—will put all Americans, no matter where they live, no more than a keystroke or a mouse click away from the jobs and opportunity broadband both creates and supports.

As one young technology leader told us in our meeting—"If you think you've seen what broadband can do, you ain't seen nothing yet."

Fourth, we recognize that only innovation and technology can lead America to energy independence. We should be spending America's energy dollars in the Midwest, not the Middle East.

It is vital to both our economic future and our national security that we develop clean, sustainable energy alternatives, such as bio-based fuels, as well as new engine technologies for flex-fuel, hybrid, and bio-diesel cars and trucks. To accelerate this work, we propose a new initiative within the Department of Energy, that develops high-risk, high-reward, revolutionary energy technologies.

Our goal is energy independence, and we intend to achieve it within ten years.

Fifth, Democrats recognize the need to create a competitive small business environment for innovation. The evolu-

tion of an idea to a small business, and then ultimately to an entrepreneurial success, has been the spark for the technological revolution in our country and will be the key to continued job growth in the future.

Therefore, our agenda calls for affordable health insurance, small business financial support and technical assistance, and reduced regulation.

Essential to our pre-eminence is the protection of intellectual property. Our agenda commits to protecting the intellectual property of American innovators worldwide.

These commitments, taken together, represent a Democratic decision in favor of the future.

Can We Afford It?

There will be those who say that we can't afford to make these investments—in education, in research, in broadband, in energy independence, and in small business success. Democrats believe we can't afford not to make them. We have no choice.

These are critical priorities for our nation. We intend to submit them to the rigors of pay-as-you-go budgeting, so they will not add to the deficit, but instead will grow our economy.

We know that America's world leadership will be secured by those who operate on the frontier of knowledge discovery. From the beginning of our nation, that frontier has been aggressively expanded by America's young people, who are not wedded to old ways of thinking, or daunted by the encumbrances of the past or present.

For example, when I suggested to Google co-founder Larry Page that one of our goals in this agenda was going to be universal broadband in ten years, he said, "Ten? Why not two?"

We Admire Youth's 'Disruptive Thinking'

You'll see that our agenda sets within five years as that goal. But the energy, imagination, and I say with admiration, disruptive thinking of America's young people is propelling us into the future.

To the young people here today: "Know Your Power."

Women have always been a part of pushing that frontier, but their creative disruption has been more obvious in recent decades. Yesterday marks the 50th anniversary of Rosa Parks refusing to be refused. Because of her act of courage, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. began the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and unleashed the civil rights movement full force in our country.

Rosa Parks changed the face of America. To the young women here today, I say "Know Your Power."

A magnificent disrupter himself, Reverend Martin Luther King, in a speech entitled "The Birth of a New Age," reminded us that, "Through our scientific means we have made of the world a neighborhood and now the challenge confronts us through our moral and spiritual means to make of it a brotherhood."

The challenge we face at the beginning of the 21st Century is to unite technology with our humanity—to ensure that our newest technologies advance our most cherished values.

Moving America forward, and bringing America together—those are the two great challenges of our time—of your generation.

Our innovation agenda is part of our vision for a stronger America. It is aimed at our common future. It is a Democratic commitment to America. And it is an agenda that reflects our most basic conviction that working together, for the common good, there is no challenge too great for the American people.

Because of the spirit, optimism, and ingenuity, of the American people, Democrats believe that together, America can do better.

This is our promise to the future.

Again as President Kennedy said, “Yet the vows of this nation can only be fulfilled if we in this nation are first, and therefore, we intend to be first.”