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February 4, 2013

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510-7020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
US Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510-7010

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-6501

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-6501

Dear Majority Leader Reid, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Boehner,
and Minority Leader Pelosi:

In my recent State of the Commonwealth address, I proposed a plan for renewed investment in education, infrastructure and innovation because it is a proven strategy to promote economic growth and opportunity. As the work of the 113th Congress gets underway, I urge you to make similar investments on the federal level.

In order to ensure that we are responsibly investing in our transportation infrastructure, I encourage Congress to begin negotiating a successor to the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), the 18-month authorization of surface transportation programs that expires next year. Congress should begin the lengthy process of crafting a successor bill that adequately funds surface transportations programs for at least five to six years. Starting this process now will hopefully avoid short-

term extensions of MAP-21 that fail to provide the long-term funding certainty that states need and deserve.

We must invest in education. Only through a strong educational foundation can we equip our students with the tools to compete in an increasingly knowledge-based global economy. In the Commonwealth, my administration continues to work closely with lawmakers, educators, students, and families to build a 21st century public education system, and my recent budget proposes the highest level of K-12 public education funding in state history. But educational opportunity is a matter of national interest and states need the support of a robust federal education system to ensure that students in every corner of the country have access to quality education.

To that end, I urge Congress to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which should strive to increase college and career readiness, improve teacher effectiveness, turn around low-performing schools, and close persistent achievement gaps. Reauthorization should also provide states with greater authority to establish rigorous accountability systems, with the federal government retaining its oversight role and ensuring results, particularly for students from lower-income families, English language learners, and students with disabilities.

In order to promote the innovation that stimulates our economy, we must have a trained workforce that has the tools to turn ideas into realities. I encourage Congress to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), which provides federal funds for employment and training programs nationwide. This renewed Act should increase funding levels to meet the need for workers with skills that are in high demand and provide Governors with clearer authority to reorganize regional workforce investment programs and structures. Additionally, I urge you to restore the state discretionary or "set-aside" funding under WIA to the 15% levels specified in the law. The 15% set-aside for statewide activities has been a critical resource to identify gaps in the workforce system, address challenges that formula funds cannot address and develop innovative approaches to fundamental workforce challenges. Massachusetts has dedicated 15% set-aside funding to serve close to 100 employers and 2,300 Massachusetts workers through innovative skill-building efforts.

In the Commonwealth, my administration continues to promote new ways to ensure all our workers can enter the workforce with the skills to succeed. This year, I committed an additional \$10 million in funding for our 15 community colleges to help them offer courses that are better aligned with employer needs, and local, industry-specific curricula that provide students with the education and skills they need to excel. I encourage you to make a similar commitment to community colleges throughout the nation.

In order for our businesses to succeed and continue to innovate, there also must be a level playing field. I encourage Congress to pass legislation to give states the authority to collect sales taxes from remote, mostly Internet-based, retailers. Under the current model, brick-and-mortar businesses that collect sales taxes are unable to compete fairly with their remote competitors that fail to do so. This legislation would both level the playing field and allow states to collect the additional revenue needed to invest in our communities.

Massachusetts remains a destination for those seeking opportunity, and the same applies to our nation as a whole. I urge you, therefore, to work with your colleagues on bipartisan, comprehensive immigration reform that recognizes the essential role of immigrants in our nation and provides a clear pathway to citizenship, one that will allow them to fully integrate into the social, economic and civil fabric of American life. As the President recently stated, we are a nation of immigrants but we have an immigration system that is out of date and severely broken. The time for comprehensive reform is now.

I also urge Congress to give those in need the opportunity to get back on their feet by reauthorizing and improving the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant program. Congress should streamline benefits and provide a pathway to self-sufficiency by reinstating the "Welfare-to-Work" Family Self-Sufficiency Program. While our nation is on the road to economic recovery, TANF provides much needed assistance to those who need and deserve our help.

Our ability to invest in education, innovation and infrastructure is threatened if we are forced to divert our finite resources to respond to the dangerous storms, severe droughts and powerful natural disasters that are occurring more frequently due to climate change. Congress should adopt a

comprehensive energy policy that meets our energy needs, responds to the challenges of climate change, manages our national resources, and responsibly ensures that the nation has a diverse, safe, secure and affordable energy system that incentivizes low carbon investment and deployment. By putting such policies in place, we can create jobs with competitive wages and benefits and leave our country in a better position for future generations.

Finally, investments in our communities are weakened if our citizens live in fear of senseless gun violence. In Massachusetts, we have proposed reasonable policies to stem gun violence, enhancing our already existing legal framework of protections. We encourage Congress to do the same and enact President Obama's legislative proposals to stem gun violence. We must do everything we can to try to prevent senseless tragedy.

While there are many challenges ahead, I strongly believe that each challenge presents an opportunity to better our country for this and future generations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "Barack Obama", written in a cursive style.

Cc: Massachusetts Congressional Delegation