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Good morning, everybody. Thank you for being here.

As some of you may have guessed, we have something to announce today. It is called a “Blueprint for American Prosperity.” And what is it, in a single sentence? I think this is important.

It’s a multi-year initiative aimed at creating a new Federal partnership with state and local leaders and with the private sector to advance American prosperity.

The Blueprint offers a core, what I think is a very powerful argument. And that is the ability of the United States to compete globally and to meet the great environmental and social challenges of the 21st century rests largely on the health, vitality and prosperity of the nation’s major cities and metropolitan areas.

The date of the launch, as has already been referenced, is quite deliberate. We stand now exactly one year from the 2008 elections. And I believe, at least, that following those elections we will have a unique opportunity for a fresh start on a number of critical issues facing our country. And I think we need that fresh start.

We also stand at an important crossroads. America is experiencing a period of profound global and domestic change, increasingly global competition, economic restructuring at home. And dramatic demographic shifts are rewriting the rules of how we produce jobs, how we build wealth, and how we conserve our natural resources.

As a nation, we face an urgent set of challenges that we can no longer afford to ignore. How does the American economy maintain its cutting edge, given rising competition from abroad and economic restructuring at home? How do we grow the education and skills of our workers so that the benefits of economic growth are shared widely? And how do we grow in environmentally sound ways, while securing our energy independence, given that our population will expand by 120 million people by 2050?

In short, how do we prosper with an economy that is productive, a society that’s inclusive, and an environment that’s sustainable?

Our answer: to achieve true prosperity, we must leverage the key assets needed to excel in today's global economy. They are innovation, superior infrastructure, outstanding human capital and quality places to live. And those assets are principally concentrated and leveraged in our metropolitan areas.

As the video you saw earlier illustrates, and as the research of the Metro program demonstrates so convincingly, the popular image of America as a nation of small towns and rural communities is outdated. We are a metropolitan nation.

The United States boasts 363 metro areas, and these are the key facts. Over 80 percent of America's population lives in metro areas. The nation's top 100 metros generate 75 percent of U.S. GDP. Those same hundred areas are home to 76 percent of good-paying knowledge jobs, and are the source of 94 percent of its venture capital funding.

America's metro economies are the nation's economy. And our Federal policies must reflect this new reality.

For too long the Federal government has been, I'd say, asleep at the wheel. Federal policy has failed to keep pace with the dynamic change occurring in this country and, far too often, the immense potential of our metro areas and their efforts to innovate are being impeded by outdated, outmoded policies that no longer reflect the economic and social realities of the 21st century.

This Blueprint for American Prosperity is needed. It's a comprehensive plan to provide American metropolitan areas with the tools they need to strengthen their economies, build a strong and diverse middle class, and grow in environmentally sustainable ways. The Blueprint for American Prosperity represents the culmination, as Strobe said, of 10 years of research, policy analysis, and on-the-ground experience.

The Brookings Metro program has emerged as the premier research and policy institution in the U.S. focused on the health and vitality of cities and metropolitan areas, and leading source for independent non-partisan research and analysis of challenges and opportunities facing metropolitan America.

With the Blueprint, the Metro program is now drawing on the impressive depth of research, analysis and experience to provide us with the vital insight into the demographic, social and economic forces that, in fact, are transforming our society, and a comprehensive plan for positioning the United States to meet the great challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

To launch the Blueprint today we're releasing a paper called "MetroNation: How U.S. Metropolitan Areas Fuel American Prosperity." The paper's author, Alan Berube, the Brookings Fellow and Research Director of the Metro Program, has quantified how key drivers of American prosperity are concentrated. This is the first in a series of papers that will be releasing over the coming months to advance the Blueprint.

In March we will release a second major paper called, “Unleashing America’s Metropolitan Potential: Toward a New Federal Partnership for Prosperity,” which will outline more specifically the failure of our existing Federal approaches and the kinds of Federal reforms that are needed to unleash the economic potential of metro areas and, by extension, the rest of the nation.

In addition to setting the broad policy framework for a new prosperity agenda, we will also be releasing a series of in-depth policy briefs that outline specific achievable reforms in a dozen key policy areas, including transportation, innovation, investment, workforce housing, industry clusters, green buildings, energy research and wealth building.

The Blueprint is principally being guided and supported by the Metropolitan Leadership Council. The Leadership Council is a network of business and philanthropic leaders that is geographically and politically diverse. Currently the council includes eight corporations, eight individuals, and four foundations -- many of whom are represented here today. And thank you all for your support.

You can find a list of the Council members included in the materials you received at the registration table. The only name not included on that is the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which just last week joined the founding members of the Metropolitan Council.

The Metro team is also being advised -- I think very importantly -- by a group called Metropolitan Partners. This includes elected officials regional business alliances and civic groups, university presidents, and practitioners from metro areas around the country who are serving as active advisors and supporters of the Blueprint.

During the coming months we will continue to develop both groups, to work closely with them, in the strong belief that national policy is most successful when it builds from the knowledge and expertise of local and regional leaders.

Today we are kicking off this initiative in the nation’s capital, but in the coming months we will be traveling throughout the United States to hold regional forums in metro areas across the country. Those metro areas represent the heart of the nation’s most dynamic growth and innovation. The forums will bring together local political, business, university and civic leaders who are striving every day to create the kinds of healthy, vibrant communities that are the foundation of our country’s future.

We are facing a time of great national challenge. The stakes could not be higher. But this is also a moment of great opportunity. This time we need to get it right.

Now it’s my pleasure to present to you Bruce Katz who, many of you know, who has done a remarkable job in the last decade, and will have a lot more to tell you than I just did about this important program.

